

**Advisors Divided: The French, Americans and the Training  
Relations and Instruction Mission in South Vietnam, 1955-1956**

**A Monograph  
by  
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**AY 2011**

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			Form Approved OMB No. 074-0188	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188), Washington, DC 20503				
<b>1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)</b>		<b>2. REPORT DATE</b> 31 Mar 2011	<b>3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED</b> SAMS Monograph, June 2010 - March 2011	
<b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE</b> Advisors Divided: The Americans, French and the Training Relations and Instruction Mission in South Vietnam, 1955-1956			<b>5. FUNDING NUMBERS</b>	
<b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b> Major Gregory M. Schrein, United States Army				
<b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS) 250 Gibbon Avenue Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2134			<b>8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> Command and General Staff College 731 McClellan Avenue Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-1350			<b>10. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES</b>				
<b>12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT</b> Approved for Public Release; Distribution Unlimited				<b>12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE</b>
<b>13. ABSTRACT (Maximum 200 Words)</b> <p>This monograph examines the effectiveness of the combined French and American Training Relations and Instruction Mission. The United States' fears regarding the spread of communism during the 1950s appeared justified in Vietnam following the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu. Following the Geneva cease fire agreements in July 1954, the United States moved to fill the impending void of benefactor to the non-communist South Vietnamese. Prior to departing, both the United States and France agreed to conduct a combined advisory mission.</p> <p>Composed of French and American personnel, members of the Training Relations and Instruction Mission were chartered to reorganize the Vietnamese National Army and prepare them for a conventional war. Unfortunately, from the American advisors' perspective, all three nations were responsible for the multitude of leadership disagreements regarding objectives, organization, training, and a general lack of trust among all parties. All of these issues confronted 300 American advisors in early 1955 and did not resolve until France departed in 1956. During that period, the Training Relations and Instruction Mission achieved only marginal results and never accomplished its goal of reorganizing the Vietnamese National Army. The major issues that plagued the Training Relations and Instruction Mission, regardless of recently published doctrine, still exist today in contemporary operations.</p>				
<b>14. SUBJECT TERMS</b> South Vietnam, Advisors, Training Relations and Instruction Mission, LTG John W. O'Daniel, Edward Lansdale,				<b>15. NUMBER OF PAGES</b> 50
				<b>16. PRICE CODE</b>
<b>17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT</b> UNCLASSIFIED	<b>18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE</b> UNCLASSIFIED	<b>19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT</b> UNCLASSIFIED	<b>20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT</b> UNCLASSIFIED	

# **SCHOOL OF ADVANCED MILITARY STUDIES**

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Title of Monograph: Advisors Divided: The Americans, French and the Training Relations and Instruction Mission in South Vietnam, 1955-1956

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## **Abstract**

Advisors Divided: The Americans, French and the Training Relations and Instruction Mission in South Vietnam, 1955-1956 by MAJ Gregory M. Schrein, U.S. Army, 50 pages.

This monograph examines the effectiveness of the combined French and American Training Relations and Instruction Mission. The United States' fears regarding the spread of communism during the 1950s appeared justified in Vietnam following the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu. Following the Geneva cease fire agreements in July 1954, the United States moved to fill the impending void of benefactor to the non-communist South Vietnamese. Prior to departing, both the United States and France agreed to conduct a combined advisory mission.

Composed of French and American personnel, members of the Training Relations and Instruction Mission were chartered to reorganize the Vietnamese National Army and prepare them for a conventional war. Unfortunately, from the American advisors' perspective, all three nations were responsible for the multitude of leadership disagreements regarding objectives, organization, training, and a general lack of trust among all parties. All of these issues confronted 300 American advisors in early 1955 and did not resolve until France departed in 1956. During that period, the Training Relations and Instruction Mission achieved only marginal results and never accomplished its goal of reorganizing the Vietnamese National Army. The major issues that plagued the Training Relations and Instruction Mission, regardless of recently published doctrine, still exist today in contemporary operations.

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	4
A Colonial Power in Decline: France's Half-hearted Participation .....	11
Unequal Partners: American-South Vietnamese Interactions .....	25
Internal De-synchronization: The American Advisors.....	33
Success Stories .....	38
Conclusion.....	41
Vietnam Experience Applied to Contemporary Doctrine?.....	43
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	50

## Introduction

The Training Relations and Instruction Mission was the United States' first truly integrated, multi-national advisory effort.<sup>1</sup> Over the course of 18 months, Americans, French and South Vietnamese military personnel would seek to re-organize, train and professionalize the young Vietnamese National Army. Throughout the period, the mission would face challenges of personality conflict, mass migrations, internal strife and a general lack of unity. While the mission seemed a conceptually supportable idea, the results proved less than optimal. As a result, it would be nearly fifty years before the United States would enter into another combined advisory effort.

American entanglement in the training of the Vietnamese National Army gained significant traction following the French surrender at Dien Bien Phu. American attention on Vietnam had been steadily growing in the early 1950s and “policy makers had come to see the fighting as part of a worldwide struggle against communism...”<sup>2</sup> French surrender to the Viet Minh sent shockwaves throughout the western world as communism won a stunning victory. The surrender triggered America's efforts “to construct an anticommunist South Vietnamese state under the leadership of Ngo Dinh Diem.”<sup>3</sup> France, distracted by a growing revolt in Algeria, found itself at the negotiation table in Geneva in the summer of 1954 and willingly split Vietnam into North and South.<sup>4</sup> Since returning to their colonies in 1946, France was “determined to

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<sup>1</sup> Frank J. Abbott, “Greek Civil War, 1947-1949: Lessons for the Operational Artist in Foreign Internal Defense,” Command and General Staff College, School of Advanced Military Studies Monograph (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Command and General Staff College, 1994), 8-14. According to Abbott, the United Kingdom requested American financial assistance. The United States established the Joint United States Military Advisory and Planning Group. The difference between this effort and the later mission in Vietnam is that the British and American clearly separated duties. Americans “would advise on matters of supply, logistics and operations; the British would oversee matters of Greek military organization and training. Nothing this author has seen mentions any kind of combined command structure similar to what developed in South Vietnam in 1955.

<sup>2</sup> Mark A. Lawrence and Fredrik Logevall, eds., *The First Vietnam War: Colonial Conflict and Cold War Crisis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 2.

<sup>3</sup> Mark P. Bradley and Marilyn B. Young, eds., *Making Sense of the Vietnam Wars: Local, National and Transnational Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 6.

<sup>4</sup> Marianna P. Sullivan, *France's Vietnam Policy: A Study in French-American Relations* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978), 55. Sullivan points out that that French “prestige was at stake in the Algerian war,

reassert control over Indochina.”<sup>5</sup> With their goal of regional dominance thwarted, France still remained hopeful that the situation would allow them to “safeguard their economic interests and to regain some of their political influence in Indochina.”<sup>6</sup> However, as Ngo Dinh Diem and the United States pursued developmental policies for South Vietnam that differed from those of the French, a clash of policy and personality developed. Diem in particular, and his desire to eliminate the Sects, clashed significantly with the French, who openly supported several of the Sects. These differences in policy would ultimately result in France leaving Indo-China and the United States propping up a new and relatively weak South Vietnamese government against a communist north.

Prior to departing Vietnam, France opposed the politics of Diem and the Americans nearly every step of the way. Whether differing over the suitability of Diem as the young nation's prime minister or refusing to relinquish control over the Vietnamese Armed Forces, an atmosphere of frustration and distrust developed that exacerbated already strained relations.

Lieutenant General John “Iron Mike” O’Daniel, after his first visit to Vietnam in 1953, optimistically assessed the situation as genuinely positive and worthy of American involvement.<sup>7</sup> O’Daniel, when he returned as the Chief, Military Advise and Assist Group- Indochina in 1954, “detected a great opportunity” in the newly formed Vietnamese National Army and was confident that American training would be of great benefit.<sup>8</sup> France clearly wanted American support, both money and equipment, but denied American technical assistance to the South Vietnamese. Only

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and military and political leaders were determined not to fail...” but recognized that “...the Indochina war was already lost and best forgotten.”

<sup>5</sup> Mark A. Lawrence and Fredrik Logevall, *The First Vietnam War: Colonial Conflict and Cold War Crisis*, 7.

<sup>6</sup> Sullivan, *France's Vietnam Policy: A Study in French-American Relations*, 53.

<sup>7</sup> Memo, Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Secretary of Defense, August 28, 1953, Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), 1952-1954, vol. 13, part 1, *Indochina* (Washington, 1982), 744-746. The memorandum, signed by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Admiral Arthur Radford, mentions that O’Daniel thought the French would achieve a decisive victory over the Viet Minh by 1955, but that he and the other chiefs did not share that belief.

<sup>8</sup> Robert D. Schulzinger, *A Time for War: The United States and Vietnam, 1941-1975* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 79. O’Daniel felt that the time was right to help shape the Vietnamese now that France’s hold over the region was in decline.

once American funding and equipment began flowing directly to the Vietnamese government did France consider the possibility of American trainers assisting the Vietnamese National Army. While South Vietnam slowly developed into a sovereign nation, France, concerned with upholding the Geneva agreements, tightly maintained control over the Vietnamese National Army and begrudgingly allowed the United States to initiate a joint training program for the South Vietnamese.

The French reversal of position on allowing Americans to provide training to the Vietnamese National Army culminated several months of negotiation. The true architects of the training program were General J. Lawton Collins and French General Paul Ely. While Washington and Paris argued back and forth over verbiage, Ely and Collins collaborated in the creation of a memorandum of agreement that eventually suited both nations.<sup>9</sup> The agreement called for a combined French and American transitional advisory group, with Ely retaining his position as High Commissioner and O'Daniel subordinating himself to French control.<sup>10</sup> O'Daniel selected Training Relations and Instruction Mission as the organization's name, based off his dislike of the original Advisory Training and Operations Mission or the suggested Supreme Headquarters Instruction and Training.<sup>11</sup> The mission, officially announced by President Diem

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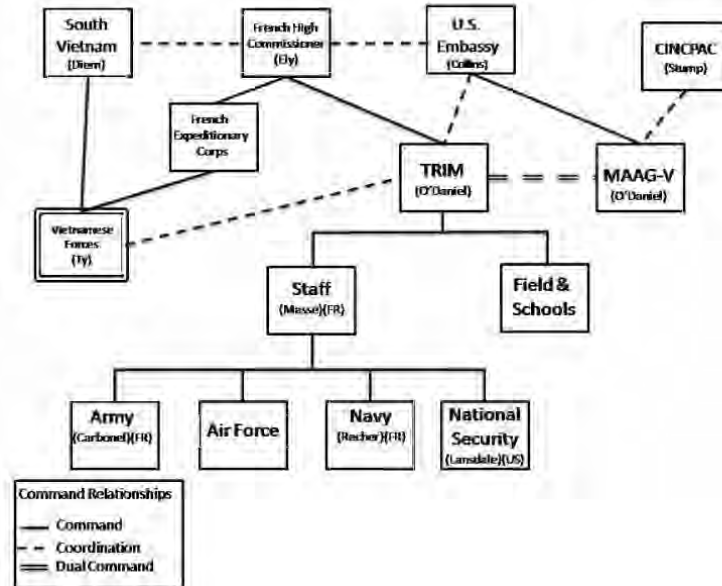
<sup>9</sup> John F. Dulles to J. Lawton Collins, 20 November 1954, J. Lawton Collins Papers, Series 3, Subseries E, Box 32, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS. Dulles told Collins following a meeting with Mendes-France that "it was agreed to refer draft minute back to you and General Ely so see if you can come up with agreed recommendation. See also telegram from the Charge' in Vietnam (Kidder) to Department of State, 13 December 1954, Department of State, *FRUS, 1952-1954, Indochina*, vol. 13, pt. 2, 2362. This memo, from Collins, discusses how he and Ely had been "on the verge of signing minute of understanding on organization and training of Vietnamese armed forces." Collins further points out that at the last minute, additional French requirements arose, including "requiring US respect for Ely's responsibilities under Geneva accords" and "several references to Geneva." Collins finally points out that he does not believe the new demands are from Ely, but from Paris, since he and Ely had "agreed to resolve few remaining minor points directly with me and since he has said several times that Paris political circles would have to be satisfied." Clearly Collins had been friends with Ely long enough to know when political constraints from Paris were slowing down progress.

<sup>10</sup> For text of Collins-Ely Agreement, See telegram from the Charge in Vietnam (Kidder) to Department of State, 14 December 1954, Department of State, *FRUS, 1952-1954, Indochina*, vol. 13, pt. 2, 2366-68. For text of final agreed upon verbiage by both US and France, see Telegram From the Special Representative in Vietnam (Collins) to the Department of State, 11 February 1955, Department of State, *FRUS, 1955-1957, Vietnam*, vol. I, 84.

<sup>11</sup> Victor J. Croizat, *Journey Among Warriors: The Memoirs of a Marine*. (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Publishing, 1997), 117-118. Croizat points out that Advisory Training and Operations Mission (ATOM)



on February 12, 1955, quickly coalesced into combined force, with Americans and French Officers sharing leadership positions within the organization.<sup>12</sup>



**Figure 1 – Training Relation and Instruction Mission Organizational Chart (27 FEB 55)<sup>13</sup>**

The mission organized into four departments (as show in Figure 1) with Americans and French directing equal numbers.<sup>14</sup> Reports from Lieutenant General O’Daniel and others praised the incredible teamwork and collaboration that occurred from all three nations.<sup>15</sup> However, off the record, Americans working within the mission found themselves frustrated and stymied by

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might be insensitive to “Asians because it recalled Hiroshima.” He then recommended to O’Daniel Supreme Headquarters Instruction and Training, “but O’Daniel thought the acronym lacked dignity.”

<sup>12</sup> Ronald H. Spector, *Advice and Support: The Early Years, 1941-1960* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1983), 3.

<sup>13</sup> No published or unpublished document depicting the organizational make-up of the training mission was located during the research for this study. This chart was developed by synthesizing multiple sources (Lansdale, O’Daniel, Croizat, et al) and developing a likely operating structure. Further research of O’Daniel’s classified papers at the National Archives or the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center may yield further documentation.

<sup>14</sup> Edward G. Lansdale, *In the Midst of Wars: An American’s Mission to Southeast Asia* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 217.

<sup>15</sup> John W. O’Daniel, interviewers unknown, date unknown, VNIT-1107, U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle Barracks, Carlisle, PA (hereafter O’Daniel Interview.) At about the 1:01:15 mark of the tape, the interviewers ask O’Daniel “Did you have any trouble, Sir, with the French in setting up this training program?” O’Daniel’s response was “No. None.”

both their French and south Vietnamese counterparts. Bickering that occurred between American and French officials over leadership and strategic direction of South Vietnam, trickled down into the training program. The squabbling further occurred between Diem and the French government. The political infighting, in addition to nearly a century of French rule, took its toll as French and Vietnamese officers consistently failed to trust and cooperate with one another. Coupled with the ever-escalating violence in Algeria and waning political support in France, the French commitment quickly scaled back from around 225 officers and several hundred Non-Commissioned Officers to being completely out of the country (minus some Air Force and Naval Advisors) by 10 April, 1956.<sup>16</sup> As the handful of American trainers endeavored to apply their “Can-Do” attitude to the situation and simultaneously sought to deal with a mass relocation of civilians from the north, it would seem that a diminished unity of effort within the organization was unavoidable. Once the French departed, Lieutenant General Samuel T. Williams, who succeeded O’Daniel as the Chief of the Military Advise and Assist Group – Vietnam in November of 1955, admitted upon his arrival in Saigon that “the whole thing looked like an enormous mess.”<sup>17</sup>

This study seeks to understand why, during the brief existence of the Training Relations and Instruction Mission, France, the United States, and South Vietnam, failed in their agreed goal of transforming the army. Why did O’Daniel and Williams hold such different impressions about the progress of the Vietnamese National Army? Were there equipment, manning or financial shortages that delayed development? While equipment availability was a factor due to French control of the logistical system, it clearly did not inhibit the Vietnamese National Army from

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<sup>16</sup> Victor J. Croizat to GEN Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr., 11 June 1955, Folder 01, Box 01, Victor J. Croizat Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University. NOTE: The total personnel varied from month to month. Initially heavier on French soldiers, by spring of 1956, the American advisors dominated. Reports on the numbers vary, but both LtCol Croizat and Ronald Spector in *Advice and Support* (p. 252) agree that 225 French officers were present in May/June of 1955. No consistent number of enlisted soldiers has been identified for the French, though a safe estimate may range from 300-500.

<sup>17</sup> Samuel T. Williams, interview by Ted Gittinger, March 2, 1981, National Archives and Records Services, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Lubbock, TX: Tape 1, p. 12 (hereafter cited as Williams Interview) Williams further mentions that O’Daniel was not much of an administrator and “hadn’t been able to set up any workable administrative system in his headquarters.”

conducting a prolonged operation against the sects in 1955. Similarly, monetary and personnel availability were not an issue. During 1955-1956, the Vietnamese National Army's manpower was significantly cut.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, financial aid to South Vietnam ceased flowing through French hands during this period, and went directly to Diem for sustainment of his economy and military forces.<sup>19</sup> The diminished significance of these previous factors creates a need to reframe the boundaries of typical examinations of this period to include human interaction. Specifically, what role did the personal, professional and political relationships and decisions of the member nations of the Training Relations Instruction Mission play in the execution of the program? The human interactions between the three nations are critical to understanding why unity of effort suffered during the 1955-1956 period. An examination of existing scholarship may provide insights into the human interactions within the Training Relations and Instruction Mission and their effects on the advisory efforts during the 1955-1956 periods.

The Training Relations Instruction Mission rarely garners serious attention from historians. Most early period Vietnam works confine the discussion to strategic decision makers, providing slight commentary towards the mission. In fact, few books spend more than one or two pages of narrative on the mission itself. The majority of authors simply acknowledge the fact that the mission occurred and that it set conditions for future American efforts.<sup>20</sup> In reality, the Training Relations and Instruction Mission sought more than to transition advisory responsibility from the French to American forces. The mission had stated goals to “create a conventional army of divisional units and supporting forces by 1 January 1956 and second, to establish follow-

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<sup>18</sup> Willard J. Webb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Prelude to the War in Vietnam, 1954-1959*. (Washington, D.C.: Office of Joint History, 2007), 40-47. According to Webb, the Vietnamese National Army had 170,000 in November 1954. By 31 December 1955, both parties agreed to a cap of 100,000 troops.

<sup>19</sup> Memo, Chairman of the Special OCB Working Group on Indochina (Young) to the Chairman of the Operations Coordinating Board (Hoover), 14 December 1954, Department of State, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, *Indochina*, vol. 13, pt. 2, 2369-2375. Tentative aid numbers showed \$74.5 million in military aid for FY 1955 (\$40 million of which was for refugee resettlement) and \$80 million in military aid for FY 1956 (no funds for refugee support.)

<sup>20</sup> J. Lawton Collins, Jr, *Vietnam Studies: The Development and Training of the South Vietnamese Army, 1950-1972* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1975), 4. Collins credits the mission with making “some progress in beginning training programs and identifying problem areas....”

through programs to increase and maintain the efficiency of this force.”<sup>21</sup> When examined against these goals, it seems probable that the training mission was a failure. The Vietnamese National Army’s transformation was certainly not complete by January of 1956, nor even by the time France departed in the spring of 1956.<sup>22</sup> Even so, the limited attention that current authors do provide to the mission fails to consider these goals or address human factors as reasons for failure to occur

The examination of relevant works relating to the Training Relations Instruction Mission, confirms that the period is largely unexplored and underappreciated.<sup>23</sup> By examining the personal and professional interactions of leaders within the Training Relations Instruction Mission, this study seeks to determine if a disruption to the unity of effort occurred and how that affected the mission’s stated goals. Thus, this study will examine how the American military advisors viewed working with France, South Vietnam and the United States. Sections focus on how American military leaders within the Training Relations and Instruction Mission perceived and felt about their coalition and inter-governmental partners. The first section highlights many of the dysfunctional relationships among French and American military leaders within the training organization, from the perspective of both commanders and several key staff members.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>22</sup> Andrew F. Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 25. Krepinevich states that transformation wasn’t complete until the fall of 1959 and that over 200 proposed tables of organization had been developed prior to arriving at an acceptable organizational structure. LTG Williams, in his interview further states that prior to his arrival, LTG O’Daniel had “done without any table of organization or anything else. He’d just taken anything he could find... Nothing bigger than a battalion, and he’d just thrown those people together the best way he could.” Williams interview, tape 2, page 25.

<sup>23</sup> The most useful works are J. Lawton Collins, Jr., *Vietnam Studies: The Development and Training of the South Vietnamese Army, 1950-1972*. (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1975) and Ronald H. Spector, *Advice and Support: The Early Years, 1941-1960* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1983.) Highly useful autobiographic works are Edward G. Lansdale, *In the Midst of Wars: An American’s Mission to Southeast Asia* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972) and Victor J. Croizat, *Journey Among Warriors: The Memoirs of a Marine* (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Publishing, 1997). Additional works with value include Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr.’s *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), Mark Moyar’s *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954-1965* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), and Bruce Palmer, Jr.’s *The Twenty-Five Year War: America’s Military Role in Vietnam* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985).

The second section discusses some actions taken by Vietnamese officials, Ngo Dinh Diem in particular, and how American leaders felt about the disruptions in relation to mission accomplishment. The third section briefly identifies some of the internally generated difficulties that slowed American progress. The final section seeks to point out the few successes leaders felt were achieved during the mission's yearlong existence. The result of this assessment shows that a lack of unity of effort was consistently present throughout the period, promulgated largely by the French and South Vietnamese, through the leadership's inability to set aside personal and professional differences for the good of South Vietnam.

### **A Colonial Power in Decline: France's Half-hearted Participation**

Conflict pervaded the American perspective regarding French involvement in the advisory effort of the Vietnamese National Army from the outset. The Joint Chiefs of Staff and Lieutenant General O'Daniel both wanted to establish a program "completely independent of French participation or control."<sup>24</sup> The Joint Chiefs therefore established four key conditions they felt were necessary prior to American involvement in an advisory effort, one of which was the complete withdrawal French troops. The Joint Chiefs further insisted that until the French troops had withdrawn, an advisory effort would be pointless due to a "lack of motivation and an unsound basis for the establishment of indigenous armed forces."<sup>25</sup> Countering the Joint Chiefs, Secretary of State Dulles pointed out that if the French withdrew prior to the development of a new army, the effects "would be militarily disastrous" and that advising could occur simultaneous to a French draw down.<sup>26</sup> The National Security Council, on August 12, 1954, determined the political gains outweighed the military concerns and drafted NSC 5429/1, which directed

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<sup>24</sup> Webb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Prelude to the War in Vietnam, 1954-1959*, 39.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 39-40.

O'Daniel to "work through the French only insofar as necessary."<sup>27</sup> The requirement to work with the French at all proved to be far easier said than done. While O'Daniel had previously gained verbal support from General Paul Ely to initiate an American training program, months would pass before the political leadership would acquiesce to American intentions.

The French still had political and economic interests in the Indo-China region and had sought to "maintain good relations with both Vietnamese regimes."<sup>28</sup> In fact, the French viewed the American desire to strengthen South Vietnam as "misguided and detrimental to French interests."<sup>29</sup> The French High Commissioner in Vietnam, General Paul Ely felt that the situation in Vietnam "did not justify direct intervention by the United States in affairs which at the time concerned only France...."<sup>30</sup> The French clearly resented the American support of the openly anti-French South Vietnamese Premier Ngo Dinh Diem. France initially felt compelled to enforce the spirit of the Geneva Accords, while the actions of both Diem and the United States "indicated the insincerity of this pledge."<sup>31</sup> However, after failing to gain American support for the removal of Diem and re-installing the Emperor Bao Dai, France reluctantly "ignored the accords they had so recently negotiated" and support American policy in Vietnam.<sup>32</sup> Thus, after months of disagreement on verbiage and roles, both France and the United States accepted the Collins-Ely Agreement in December of 1954.<sup>33</sup> France agreed to be the supportive partner to American policies and the door was open for the beginnings of the American advisory effort.

Unfortunately, the strategic shift in interest did not migrate into the French Expeditionary Corps or those officers and non-commissioned officers now working in the Training Relations and Instruction Mission. While on the surface, the French espoused a desire to assist American efforts in reshaping the Vietnamese National Army, the realities rarely matched the rhetoric of the

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>28</sup> Marianna P. Sullivan, *France's Vietnam Policy: A Study in French-American Relations*, 55.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Ely, *L'Indo-Chine dans la Tourmente (Indo-China in Turmoil)* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1964), 152.

<sup>31</sup> Marianna P. Sullivan, *France's Vietnam Policy: A Study in French-American Relations*, 52.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 54.

<sup>33</sup> Spector, *Advice and Support: The Early Years, 1941-1960*, 239.

political leadership. Often, French leadership provided indifferent support to advising operations, refused to implement American training methods, prevented their soldiers from participation and in some cases, refused to hand over control of Vietnamese organizations to the South Vietnamese. Much of this can be summed up by Ely, who stated that "...our differences of opinion were basic, particularly because the Americans viewed the Indo-Chinese war only through the eyes of the Korean conflict...."<sup>34</sup> All of the above-described instances, relayed through accounts of American officers working within the training mission, served as a constant source of frustration and aggravation, justifying the Joint Chiefs' initial misgivings and contributed to the mission's disunity. While each American officer had varying degrees of unpleasant experience with the French, all recognized them as an impediment, from the mission commander to the junior lieutenant.<sup>35</sup>

Lieutenant General John W. "Iron Mike" O'Daniel had a long and distinguished Army career that made him a prime candidate for the Chief of the Military Advise and Assist Group-Indochina. Starting his career as an enlisted soldier in World War I, O'Daniel rose to command the Third Infantry Division in World War II, First Corps in Korea and eventually "all army forces in the Pacific."<sup>36</sup> His involvement in Vietnam began during the siege at Dien Bien Phu and would last more than a decade after his retirement through his chairmanship of the political lobby group, the American Friends of Vietnam.<sup>37</sup> O'Daniel vigorously supported the Diem regime and was branded by his superiors at the Pentagon as being overly optimistic in his assessments of the

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<sup>34</sup> Ely, *L'Indo-Chinés dans la Tourmente (Indo-China in Turmoil)*, 152.

<sup>35</sup> This assessment is based on the fact that officers from the senior levels (O'Daniel and Williams), to mid-grade leaders like Lansdale and Croizat, to junior officers like Phillips (commissioned in October 1952) all had and reported negative encounters with the French during their tours in Vietnam. Each, as this study portrays, identified the French as part of the problem in developing the Vietnamese National Army.

<sup>36</sup> Seth Jacobs, *America's Miracle Man in Vietnam: Ngo Dinh Diem, Religion, Race, and U.S. Intervention in Southeast Asia, 1950-1957* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 236.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 235-238. O'Daniel accepted the chairmanship of the American Friends of Vietnam in 1956, after assurances from Eisenhower's staff that the group was "sound in every respect." However, following Diem's assassination in 1963, O'Daniel resigned from the group after refusing "to sign a letter of congratulations to the generals who carried out the coup...."

ground truth.<sup>38</sup> In a speech to the American Friends of Vietnam on June 1, 1956, O'Daniel stated that "...I believe the French are carrying on the training in a satisfactory manner."<sup>39</sup> However, while much of O'Daniel's official correspondence spoke of effective cooperation with the French and progress with the Vietnamese, many of his unpublished documents and interviews are contradictory and portray an environment of confusion and conflict. In fact, in a letter from the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral W. Radford agreed with a previous assessment from O'Daniel that "the French lacked the ability to train the natives..." due to the French being "too much influenced by politics."<sup>40</sup> Since O'Daniel early on praised the potential and fighting spirit of the Vietnamese people, it seems unlikely he could have made the conclusion that the Vietnamese National Army could be to blame for their poor level of training.<sup>41</sup> A likely conclusion available to O'Daniel then, was that the French and their current training program were at fault and thus, were incapable of effectively contributing to the training of the South Vietnamese.

The French demonstrated their lack of capability to O'Daniel's during his tour of their fortifications at Dien Bien Phu on February 2, 1954. As O'Daniel toured the site with the commander, Colonel Christian de Castries, he enquired "why he [de Castries] didn't have his troops occupying the high ground."<sup>42</sup> O'Daniel claims that de Castries "replied that he didn't have enough troops..." but was cognizant that if the enemy had artillery, which he did not

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<sup>38</sup> Spector, *Advice and Support: The Early Years, 1941-1960*, 181. General Ridgway was the most outspoken against O'Daniel's report and wanted the Joint Chiefs to "point out explicitly that the entire O'Daniel report was "overly optimistic." They did not.

<sup>39</sup> John W. O'Daniel, Speech at American Friends of Vietnam Conference, June 1, 1956, John W. O'Daniel Papers, Box 8, Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle Barracks, PA. By this time, the French were exclusively training the Vietnamese Navy and Air Forces while the Americans trained the Army.

<sup>40</sup> Radford to O'Daniel, 7 June 1972, John W. O'Daniel Papers, Box 8, Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle Barracks, PA.

<sup>41</sup> John W. O'Daniel, *The Nation That Refused to Starve: The Challenge of the New Vietnam* (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc, 1960), 10. O'Daniel summarizes much of his early sentiment in his propaganda piece, aimed towards American youths, which he wrote while chair of the American Friends of Vietnam. O'Daniel touts how the Vietnamese were "wonderful fighters," "eager to learn," and every person he encountered had "the spirit to win."

<sup>42</sup> John W. O'Daniel, "O'Daniel report to Congressional Committee on Un-American Activities: Communism in South East Asia, particularly Vietnam," 1956, John W. O'Daniel Papers, Box 8, p4, Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle Barracks, PA.



believe, that their position would be in danger.<sup>43</sup> O'Daniel dutifully informed his superiors of the situation and even went so far as to plead to the French commanding general Henri Navarre who's only comment on the situation was that "All is lost."<sup>44</sup> O'Daniel felt that this attitude carried over following the defeat at Dien Bien Phu into the development of the Vietnamese National Army. In the months following Geneva, O'Daniel developed multiple plans to train the Vietnamese but "All our appeals met deaf ears generally with the remark that it was 'too difficult'".<sup>45</sup> O'Daniel's final assessment in 1956, which probably fed what he would later tell Radford, was that:

I disagreed with all these lame excuses. I am convinced that the French lack the know how to quickly train large bodies of troops. Certainly their ability to handle large units does not compare with ours. I am convinced the Vietnamese could have been welded into a strong army in time to have won over the Viet Minh.<sup>46</sup>

While O'Daniel's impressions of French leadership and ability were likely shaped out of the Dien Bien Phu disaster, several other incidents contributed to his final assessment.

O'Daniel recounts an incident, likely in the fall of 1954, regarding the French openly encouraging the Vietnamese National Army Chief of Staff, General Hinh to overthrow Ngo Dinh Diem. While other historians have recounted the details of General Hinh's desires to depose Diem, few examples mention specific incidents of French encouragement. O'Daniel, who had "spent hours with Hinh in trying to convince him that he should get into line," observed a "Frenchman ask Hinh when he was going to take over."<sup>47</sup> Surely O'Daniel could not have been pleased to observe his partners openly subverting the hard work he had personally put into preventing a coup. O'Daniel very plainly puts the blame for General Hinh's behavior some of the French by stating that "There is no doubt in my mind but what Hinh was being encouraged by a

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>47</sup> John W. O'Daniel, "Footsteps to Freedom: Artillery at Midnight," unpublished, 1956, John W. O'Daniel Papers, Box 8, Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle Barracks, PA.

few French anti-Diem people.”<sup>48</sup> Anti-Diem French were not the only issue O’Daniel found stemming from his partnership with France in training the Vietnamese National Army. Some impediments from the French moved from subversion to outwardly violent.

Two violent incidents remained engrained in O’Daniel’s mind as the years went on and he recounted them in his unpublished manuscript, *Footsteps to Freedom*. In one incident, an officer from the Embassy Staff, COL George Wertz, found his car had been destroyed. O’Daniel states that a “thermite grenade was tossed into the open window...” and that “two French junior officers found with plastic charges were finally arrested.”<sup>49</sup> While no one was injured, the men only served three months in jail and were returned to France. O’Daniel was quite certain the officers were French communists, citing that “With 20% to 25% of the votes cast in France for the communists, it is of course conceivable that a certain proportion would be in the armed services.”<sup>50</sup> Whether or not communism was the motivator for the attack, or something else, this was not an isolated incident. O’Daniel claims that “...no more incidents of this kind...” occurred following the arrest, on the very next page he relays a later incident of an attempted attack. On this occasion, a French officer lurking around the U.S. housing area was scared off by a guard. “The police found a plastic charge in the area and although [sic] it could not positively be traced to the officer this was enough for the police.”<sup>51</sup> The officer was later arrested. However, all of these incidents still did not fully convince O’Daniel of the lack of unity within the mission. Rufus Phillips stated that evidence eventually traced back to officers of the French Deuxieme Bureau, attempting to “frighten us off with this kind of stuff...”<sup>52</sup> Even in an official interview in 1972, O’Daniel still stated that the majority of the French were very helpful and that he never had

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>52</sup> Rufus C. Phillips, interview by Ted Gittinger, March 4, 1982, National Archives and Records Services, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Lubbock, TX, The Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Library of Congress.<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/diplomacy/authorP.html> (accessed January 30, 2011) (hereafter Phillips Interview)

any problems with them during his time in Vietnam.<sup>53</sup> This directly conflicts with his letter to Radford that very same year. O'Daniel's constant vacillation regarding the French and their effectiveness can only lead to the conclusion that in his official capacity, O'Daniel felt the need to keep up appearances for the sake of national relations. O'Daniel once told Chicago Daily News reporter Keyes Beech off the record that he "he could understand why they're [the French in Vietnam] sensitive, but I don't know what they've got to be proud of."<sup>54</sup> Several of his officers, and his successor, felt no need to maintain separate opinions.

COL Edward Lansdale, the head of Training Relations and Instruction Mission's National Security Division serves as a key source to many of the American difficulties caused by French participation. Lansdale, who had previously singlehandedly propped up the Magsaysay government in the Philippines, had been working in Vietnam with O'Daniel since May of 1954 and had witnessed the evolution of American involvement. Lansdale's primary responsibility as the National Security Division chief was the pacification effort, to which he provided "the training advice and the operational advice and so on that the Vietnamese would carry out."<sup>55</sup> With a multi-national staff, "there was some difficulty in operating, due to this Division's mission of giving sensitive politico-military advice to Vietnamese who mistrusted the French."<sup>56</sup> Lansdale, over the months he was involved at the Training Relations Instruction Mission, became frustrated with his coalition partners and ultimately determined that there was "too little amity in TRIM for me."<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> O'Daniel Interview.

<sup>54</sup> Keyes Beech, interview by Ted Gittinger, March 22, 1983, National Archives and Records Services, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library: Tape 1, p. 2.(hereafter Beech interview)

<sup>55</sup> Edward G. Lansdale, interview by Ted Gittinger, June 5, 1981, National Archives and Records Services, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library: Tape 1, p. 14. (hereafter Lansdale Interview)

<sup>56</sup> Edward G. Lansdale, "Memorandum For The Record - "Pacification" In Vietnam", 15 July 1958, Folder 26, Box 17, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 06 - Democratic Republic of Vietnam, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University. This memo was written by Lansdale "in response to a recent request from CINCUSPAC for information on this subject, to facilitate CAMG planning for PACOM countries. Apparently no reports or documents on the subject are available in the Pentagon."

<sup>57</sup> Lansdale, *In the Midst of Wars: An American's Mission to Southeast Asia*, 217. While the primary definition of amity is friendship, I believe Lansdale is using the alternate definition, which is defined as "mutual understanding and a peaceful relationship, esp. between nations." Carbonel likely did not start off

One of Lansdale's first comments about how the interaction between French and Americans occurred at the mission's headquarters' shortly after his assignment as a department head. The Chief of Staff for the Training Relations and Instruction Mission at the time, a Frenchman named Colonel Jean Carbonel, refused to speak to him directly.<sup>58</sup> These discussions deteriorated to little more than futile exchanges, in English, between Lansdale and Carbonel, as the adjutant relayed each man's response to the other. Lansdale further claimed that Carbonel treated him just as poorly in social settings as in the office, but that Lansdale "hardly endeared myself to him by my own behavior."<sup>59</sup> The frustration would not merely center on the chief of staff, but worked its way into the other departments as well.

Lansdale was full of ideas to assist the Vietnamese in their pacification efforts and wanted to take advantage of the years of experience his French subordinates had gained while in country. However, senior French officers had alternate ideas of what French soldiers should be doing within the Training Relations and Instruction Mission and none of those tasks had anything to do with supporting Lansdale.<sup>60</sup> Quashing initiative was a regular occurrence on the part of French senior leaders. In one incident, a French officer's initiative resulted in his immediate departure from Vietnam the following day. The officer had expressed a desire to educate some of the local Vietnamese children by establishing a youth program to which Lansdale approved as "worthy of backing."<sup>61</sup> The officer left with "his eyes lit up" and desiring "further service in

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as the Chief of Staff but was promoted following Masse's undated departure. Documents from O'Daniel place Carbonel as the Director of the Army Department. Perhaps the feud between Lansdale and Carbonel began early on and continued as Carbonel became the Chief of Staff.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 217-218.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 218.

<sup>60</sup> This comment is based primarily upon Lansdale's statement in his oral history and in *In the Midst of Wars* where he claims that French Intelligence specifically assigned operatives into his National Security Division within the mission, in order to keep tabs on him. See Lansdale Interview, 15-17 and Edward Lansdale's *In the Midst of Wars*, 218-219.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 219-220. The officer told Lansdale that he had three months remaining in Vietnam and was "frankly sitting out the time until departure." Lansdale discovered that the officer had desired to start a youth program for Vietnamese children and Lansdale gave his support to the activity. The officer went to discuss the issue with superiors and returned the next day saying he had been ordered back to France the very next day.

Vietnam....”<sup>62</sup> However, the officer returned the next morning with a very different demeanor and informed Lansdale that he was going back to France. Lansdale claims that incidents of this nature occurred all the time. “I’d fit them up with the Vietnamese to start working on things and they’d really pitch in, and they’d be about two weeks at that job and the French would immediately send them home.”<sup>63</sup> Rufus Phillips, one of Lansdale’s junior officers, claimed that “French Colonial Office folks...were the ones who were involved in the plotting, and they would lie to Ely about what the hell was going on.....”<sup>64</sup> These reports would then make their way back to Collins, who “thought that whatever [Paul] Ely told him was the truth, because they’d both been comrades in World War II.”<sup>65</sup> Lansdale’s frustration finally caused him to directly appeal to General Ely claiming that senior French officers were impeding his efforts. Before Lansdale could brief Ely, however, the officer who had agreed to tell Ely what was going on “was immediately gouged....”<sup>66</sup> When asked why these officers were so quickly sent back to France for trying to do their jobs, Lansdale responded that they had been perceived as having “sold out.”<sup>67</sup> A group that had not sold out and caused Lansdale’s department even more frustration was the French intelligence service.

French officers of Lansdale’s staff openly admitted to being in intelligence services and, “were busy writing reports on my [Lansdale] daily activities.”<sup>68</sup> At one point, the French clandestine service called Lansdale in for what amounted to an interrogation session, accusing him of various fabricated charges. Two examples illustrate some of the ideas the French held about what Lansdale was doing in Vietnam. The first charge was that Lansdale had personally bribed various Vietnamese with American dollars to diminish French support. Second, and less

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 220.

<sup>63</sup> Lansdale Interview, Tape 1, 16.

<sup>64</sup> Phillips Interview

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Lansdale Interview, Tape 1, 16-17. Lansdale’s slang use of “gouge” implies that other French officers got to the informer and persuaded him to keep quiet.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>68</sup> Lansdale, *In the Midst of Wars: An American’s Mission to Southeast Asia*, 218.

believable, was that he was the mastermind behind an attempt to blow up Haiphong Harbor and the French Admiral in command of the area. While Lansdale demonstrated these charges to be false, they stuck with him throughout his duration at the mission and eventually led to his inability to effectively manage the department.<sup>69</sup> While the French in COL Lansdale's department were busying themselves with accounting for his daily activities, LtCol Victor Croizat, USMC was making even less progress inside the Naval Department.

The Training Relations and Instruction Mission's Naval Department was initially directed by a Frenchman, Capitaine de Vaisseau Malroux, who had the additional task of commanding the Vietnamese Navy.<sup>70</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Victor Croizat was the sole Marine officer on O'Daniel's staff. Due to his speaking French and having attended the French War College in 1949, he had been serving as O'Daniel's interpreter prior to the formation of the advising mission.<sup>71</sup> Upon the standing up of the advisory mission, Croizat was assigned to the Naval Division. Croizat initially "questioned the value of American advice channeled through a Franco-American training mission to Vietnamese units under French command."<sup>72</sup> He voiced those doubts in a series of letters to the Commandant of the Marine Corps, GEN Lemuel C. Shepherd stating that, "the presence of French Officers in the Navy and Marine Headquarters precluded the acceptance of very much U.S. 'advice'".<sup>73</sup> Croizat further pointed out that "personal relations with the French were excellent but on the professional basis they ran the navy and we looked on as interested parties."<sup>74</sup> In fact, since the French had not only created the Vietnamese

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<sup>69</sup> Lansdale Interview, Tape 1, 33. The final incident concerned Lansdale's friendship with Trinh Minh The, leader of Cao Dai forces and a well-known anti-French guerilla. The French blamed The for the death of several French Generals. Lansdale contends that the French were ultimately responsible for The's death. Either way, the incident was the final wedge between Lansdale and his staff and culminated in his departing the mission.

<sup>70</sup> Croizat to GEN Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr., 9 May 1955, Folder 01, Box 01, Victor J. Croizat Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.

<sup>71</sup> Robert H. Whitlow, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: The Advisory & Combat Assistance Era, 1954-1964* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Marine Corps, 1977), 16.

<sup>72</sup> Victor J. Croizat, *Journey Among Warriors: The Memoirs of a Marine*, 118.

<sup>73</sup> Croizat to Shepherd, Jr., 17 September 1955, Folder 01, Box 01, Victor J. Croizat Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

Navy, but also trained, supplied and maintained it, Croizat found he had “little to contribute.”<sup>75</sup> Unfortunately, this frustrating trend would continue until August 20, 1955 when Diem would appoint a Vietnamese officer, Lt. CDR Le Quang My, to command the Vietnamese Navy.<sup>76</sup> My’s first order of business, without any consultation from the Americans, French or the Vietnamese Chief of Staff, was to officially remove French officers from all command positions.<sup>77</sup>

At the point where the French no longer held command authority over the Naval and Marine forces, a change occurred in the effectiveness of the Naval Department. Croizat felt that the French now “...found themselves with nothing more than an advisory function[s] comparable to those of U.S. personnel” which led to “...harmonizing relations and functions between U.S. and French personnel....”<sup>78</sup> The new spirit of cooperation within the naval department led to a “detailed review of the whole Vietnamese naval establishment” which led to the basis of several plans to reorganize the Vietnamese naval forces.<sup>79</sup> While skeptical of French support to the Training Relations and Instruction Mission, Croizat said upon its deactivation in April of 1956 that “TRIM was an unusual organization, an expedient of limited duration that helped an awkward transition.”<sup>80</sup> The French however, continued to stew over the way Diem had quickly forced them from the limelight, but continued to advise the navy and air forces until May 31, 1957 when they were dismissed by the South Vietnamese government.<sup>81</sup>

While it is possible to see Victor Croizat’s experience within the Naval Division of the Training Relations and Instruction Mission as ending relatively positively, Lieutenant General O’Daniel’s successor, Lieutenant General Samuel T. Williams did not share the same feelings. When Williams assumed command of the Military Advisory and Assistance Group – Vietnam

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<sup>75</sup> Victor J. Croizat, *Journey Among Warriors: The Memoirs of a Marine*, 118

<sup>76</sup> Croizat to Shepherd, Jr., 17 September 1955, Folder 01, Box 01, Victor J. Croizat Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Victor J. Croizat, “Vietnamese Naval Forces: Origins of the Species” in *The Marines in Vietnam 1954-1973: An Anthology and Annotated Bibliography* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1985), 10.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>80</sup> Victor J. Croizat, *Journey Among Warriors: The Memoirs of a Marine*, 119.

<sup>81</sup> Bernard B. Fall, *The Two Viet-Nams: A Political and Military Analysis* (New York: Praeger, 1967), 320.

and concurrently the Training Relations and Instruction Mission, he found himself in a highly complex and challenging environment. In a letter to a friend in early 1956, Williams stated that:

I find this assignment the most challenging of my life. Pure combat or commanding anything from a regiment to an army is a “breeze” compared to this... The French, the Vietnamese and the Sects will attempt to change the rules in the middle of the game and when cornered will state ‘it’s a misunderstanding due to faulty interpreters,’ or else...give no reason at all.<sup>82</sup>

Williams felt that the French and the Vietnamese officers whom held French commissions “objected to our being there and resented it very much.”<sup>83</sup> While Williams arrived towards the end of the French occupation, and primarily dealt with the after effects of nearly a hundred years of French rule of Vietnam, he was not unaffected by their physical presence.

One of Williams’ bigger problems with the French involved the Naval Department and casts some doubt on Croizat’s earlier depiction of the renewed cooperative spirit within the department following the 1 May 1955 Vietnamese assumption of command of Naval Forces. In an effort to get more American presence in the department, Williams had been trying to insert advisors into the Vietnamese Naval Academy, which was still run by the French. Captain Jean Recher, who at some point had replaced Captain Malroux, vigorously opposed Williams’ efforts.<sup>84</sup> Recher told Williams that:

...as long as you insist on the Vietnamese being in command and Americans merely being advisors, I’m going to fight you every step of the way until I’m shipped out of Vietnam. If you try to put one single advisor in the naval academy, I’ll pull every French officer out of that academy within the hour after you do it.”<sup>85</sup>

Due to the limited number of personnel available in the American contingent, Williams was unable to risk calling Recher’s bluff and ended up backing down. When asked why he felt the

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<sup>82</sup> Williams to Ed Fink, 23 January 1956, quoted in Frederick W. Schneider, “Advising the ARVN: Lieutenant General Samuel T. Williams in Vietnam, 1955-1960,” Master’s thesis (University of North Texas, 1990), 26.

<sup>83</sup> Williams Interview, Tape 1, p. 22. Williams made this comment while testifying to the Mansfield Commission in 1959 and stated that he comment sparked an argument between himself and the Ambassador at the time, Eldridge Dubrow.

<sup>84</sup> Croizat, “Vietnamese Naval Forces: Origins of the Species” in *The Marines in Vietnam 1954-1973: An Anthology and Annotated Bibliography*, 4. Croizat identifies Recher as the last head of the French Naval Mission and as being in charge of the Vietnamese Naval Schools at the time Diem asserted control over the Navy.

<sup>85</sup> Williams Interview, Tape 1, p. 79



French were so adamant about maintaining control, Williams stated that “He [Recher] just thought we should take command as the French had done and not let the Vietnamese command their own navy...I think he thought we were just spinning our wheels....”<sup>86</sup>

Another area where Williams truly felt he was spinning his wheels was in the accountability and transfer of equipment from the French to the South Vietnamese. In addition to having to train the Vietnamese forces, Williams was also responsible for the accounting and collection of \$1.2 billion in equipment that had been provided to the French through the Pentilateral Agreement of 23 December 1950.<sup>87</sup> In the five years that the French received equipment, little of it was properly maintained or accounted for by any party. The decision was made in Washington to recover the equipment and maintain it until such a time that the Vietnamese could make use of it.<sup>88</sup> Although Williams eventually received additional personnel after the French departed, during the time of the Training Relations and Instruction Mission, he could not even get into French compounds to account for property with the minimal staff he did have.<sup>89</sup> In one incident, Ambassador Reinhardt called Williams to ask why there were “...tanks rolling down behind my house going down to the river and being loaded on ships.”<sup>90</sup> Williams’s response was that since his men were greatly outnumbered and unarmed, they could not “...keep those people [the French] from loading on anything here that they want to take to France.”<sup>91</sup> By the time Williams was asked to provide an accounting of all the property in country to Secretary Dulles, he responded that records did not exist. Williams reported the French were essentially stealing the equipment they wanted, to which Dulles responded with “Of course they’re going to

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 79. Williams goes on to state that the French felt the Americans would be unable to teach the Vietnamese and even if they did, the Vietnamese wouldn’t fight.

<sup>87</sup> Ronald H. Spector, *Advice and Support: The Early Years, 1941-1960*, 257.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 261.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 258. Spector states that French officials would refuse American’s entrance to depots and warehouses. This practice occurred early on as well, with O’Daniel mentioning that American advisors were often not allowed into French compounds.

<sup>90</sup> Williams Interview, Tape 1, 33.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 33.

steal you blind.”<sup>92</sup> Equipment the French did not want often made its way to dumps, like the Acre of Diamonds. Williams describes the Acre of Diamonds as a place that “I saw Cadillac engines...sunk in the mud. Things of that nature, artillery pieces, anything you could possibly imagine, bull-dozers, trucks...left in the mud and the weather.”<sup>93</sup> Clearly, trying to simultaneously track down \$1.2 billion dollars of equipment with 342 American personnel, while the French loaded it on ships for France, and trying to train an entire nation’s military force had a great toll on the mission’s effectiveness.

There can be little doubt that relations among the French and American members of the Training Relations and Instruction Mission were often strained. No soldier who has served in an advisory capacity would feel very effective with the number of distractions and problems generated by a coalition partner.<sup>94</sup> Personal bias, war weariness, and plain uncooperative behavior did little to endear the French to the Americans and only continued to degrade the already poor relationship with the South Vietnamese. While the French high command often talked of cooperation, the ground truth was often less so. As shown, the French seemed more interested in maintaining their legacy, spying on officers, and grabbing excess equipment than in training their former colonial subjects. Consistently different priorities of work, often driven by personal agendas, plagued the departments within the Training Relations and Instruction Mission. When coupled with a diverse mission given to American forces, the French refusal to provide maximum support to their partners added to the confusion and chaos that disrupted the unity of effort within the advisory effort. France, however, cannot alone bear the full measure of blame for the unfocused and disjointed efforts of the mission. For while the French were stonewalling

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 34-35. Dulles seemed generally unsurprised by the disorganization and overt theft of the American property by the French. Conversely, when Williams passed on the information to the Military Advise and Assist Group in Paris, he was informed that Washington did not believe “the French would do anything like that.” However, a few months later, General Jaquot was bragging in newspapers about all the “equipment that he had brought back from South Vietnam.”

<sup>93</sup> Williams Interview, Tape 1, 27. Williams also discusses finding warehouses full of crates strewn open, unmarked parts in mounds and left to sort out the mess, untrained Vietnamese supply clerks with no idea what they were looking at.

<sup>94</sup> Comment based on author’s personal experience as a military advisor in Iraq from 2008 to 2009.

and promoting different priorities, the South Vietnamese pursued an agenda that infuriated the French and compounded the problems already frustrating the Americans.

### **Unequal Partners: American-South Vietnamese Interactions**

The South Vietnamese walked away from the Geneva accords, believing that since they had not signed the document, they were not bound to the agreement.<sup>95</sup> The Emperor Bao Dai had not even attended the closing days of the conference.<sup>96</sup> Several of the agreements greatly angered the newly appointed Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem. First was the direction of elections in 1956, which Diem assumed would “merely give the communists the opportunity to cheat their way into power.”<sup>97</sup> The second issue concerned the permission for French forces to remain in the country and help maintain the balance of power, deterring a potential communist invasion. These two issues would be central to the new Diem government. Among the multiple problems surfacing as the Americans endeavored to work with the young government, three surfaced that heavily affected the ability of the Training Relations and Instruction Mission. First, a major humanitarian effort surfaced from nearly one million Vietnamese seeking refuge from the North. The sea lift, managed by the advisors, dominated a large share of available resources, both man power and equipment. Second, the need for Diem to consolidate his power manifested itself in a purging of his staff and three major sects within South Vietnam: the Binh Xuyen criminal group, the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai sects. Diem’s effort to eliminate these organizations would exacerbate the third and most long standing of problems, the presence of the French. These three major issues would create considerable disruptions to the efforts of the Training Relations and Instruction Mission and would serve as a key reason why the mission was disjointed.

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<sup>95</sup> Phillip E. Catton, *Diem’s Final Failure: Prelude to America’s War in Vietnam* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 27. Diem’s delegation was prevented from “the behind-the-scenes deliberations of the main players....”

<sup>96</sup> Fall, *The Two Viet-Nams: A Political and Military Analysis*, 232. Fall recounts that Bao Dai “antagonized everybody by following the proceedings from his Chateau de Thorenc, near Cannes....”

<sup>97</sup> Catton, *Diem’s Final Failure: Prelude to America’s War in Vietnam*, 27.

One of the first major disruptions that the Training Relations and Instruction Mission found itself facing was the relocation of nearly one million refugees from what had recently been designated North Vietnam. The terms of the Geneva Agreement required that “French and Viet Minh forces be regrouped in their respective zones within 330 days after the armistice became effective.”<sup>98</sup> Additionally, the agreement further allowed for the movement of civilians either into or out of the North. Large numbers of displaced civilians began flowing into refugee camps and quickly overwhelmed the ability of the French forces to handle their movement, forcing both the French and South Vietnamese to request American assistance on August 7, 1954.<sup>99</sup> Americans had been assessing the growing situation for several months and most Americans in Vietnam knew that “At some point the Vietnamese government would have to call upon the United States for assistance.”<sup>100</sup> Lieutenant General O’Daniel, as the commander of the Military Advise and Assist Group, “became the overall military coordinator for land based operations” and for the next nine months would find his organization intimately involved in the movement of personnel and property.<sup>101</sup> O’Daniel’s organization:

was principally responsible for getting the Vietnamese to the embarkation center, inspecting them, and getting them to the loading areas as well as ensuring that the debarkation area was operating efficiently. MAAG also provided the same services for the equipment and vehicles awaiting transport.”<sup>102</sup>

In what would prove to be a telling example of the tendency of future cooperation, the French officials involved in the operation regularly diverged “regarding their responsibility – responses varying from no responsibility at all to complete control of the operation.”<sup>103</sup> Obviously, the new and barely functioning South Vietnamese government proved incapable of providing effective

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<sup>98</sup> Webb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Prelude to the War in Vietnam, 1954-1959*, 97.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>100</sup> Ronald B. Frankum, Jr., *Operation Passage to Freedom: The United States Navy in Vietnam, 1954-1955* (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 2007), 29. Frankum notes that while Americans in Vietnam were not surprised by the request for aid, most officials outside the region were caught completely unaware by the extent of assistance requested.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 59. The overall civilian authority for the entire operation was the ambassador, Donald Heath. Admiral Lorenzo Saban was the commander of the actual naval element, named Task Force 90, which did the actual transport from Haiphong to the South.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 64.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 64.

support. While the Training Relations and Instruction Mission was not directly tasked to support this endeavor, it was unquestionably affected by the fact that all the Americans within the mission, to include O'Daniel, were also part of the Military Advise and Assist Group - Vietnam. Clearly, Operation Exodus required far more than a couple of Americans from the advisory group. Victor Croizat, the deputy Naval-Marine advisor in the Training Relations and Instruction Mission saw the refugee situation as "a drama of unexpected magnitude which, five days after my arrival, settled the question of my duties."<sup>104</sup> O'Daniel "was everywhere..." as were "...other American, French, and Vietnamese officials who labored to receive and resettle the ever-growing numbers."<sup>105</sup> Resources, personnel and equipment, clearly were unavailable to simultaneously support the training and advising of the Vietnamese National Army. The operation concluded on May 16, 1955, facilitating the relocation of nearly 620,000 displaced persons and having successfully "transported 304, 704 refugees, 68,727 tons of cargo, and 8,114 vehicles."<sup>106</sup> Finally, the mission would have the opportunity to get to work training the Vietnamese National Army, who were currently engaged in a near civil war.

South Vietnam was a nation in infancy, incapable of self-sufficiency and without unity of effort or purpose.<sup>107</sup> The disjointedness of the country weighed heavily on its American backed leader Diem. With France and the United States disagreeing about his fitness for leadership, Diem took matters into his own hands to better his chances during the upcoming elections. His first major action was to eliminate the major armed sects within South Vietnam. As a Sect

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<sup>104</sup> Croizat, *Journey Among Warriors: The Memoirs of a Marine*, 105.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 105.

<sup>106</sup> Webb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Prelude to the War in Vietnam, 1954-1959*, 99. Dates of the final day of the operation conflict between Webb and Frankum. In *Operation Passage to Freedom*, Frankum states that May 18 (see page 205) was the final day, which is two days later than Webb's May 16. Final Department of State estimates claim that over 900, 000 refugees eventually moved South.

<sup>107</sup> Mark Moyer, *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954-1965* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 33-34. This statement is based off the description Moyer paints of South Vietnam following the signing of the Geneva Accords in July 1954. Moyer describes a nation as a "shattered land." Infrastructure had been "blown up, and the roads were riddled with deep potholes." "French businessmen, consumers, soldiers, and capital were flowing out of the country, tearing the vital organs from the body of the South Vietnamese economy." He further describes an army that had "disintegrated" and leaders who "did not try to put it back together." Finally, Moyer describes Diem as a man who "did not even have authority" to "assemble the remnants of government power and try to restore order."

controlled the police, his only viable tool for taking this action was the newly created Vietnamese National Army.

The Vietnamese National Army generally organized at the battalion level.<sup>108</sup> Orders routinely bypassed all senior levels of command, arriving directly in the hands of the battalion commanders<sup>109</sup>. Political connections and demonstrated loyalty were required if one wanted to “advance within the ARVN ranks.”<sup>110</sup> This mismanagement by Diem had resulted in several coup attempts, to include the Chief of Staff GEN Hinh in late 1954 and had required significant American efforts to prevent.<sup>111</sup> However, once in control of his military, Diem could pursue his agenda against the Binh Xuyen criminal group, the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai sects with the army.<sup>112</sup> The Sects, supported by the French in various ways, were “strong and well organized.”<sup>113</sup> Diem, un-phased by French calls for mediation though Bao Dai and threats to separate all sides by force launched an all-out offensive.<sup>114</sup> While ultimately successful in defeating the Sects, the army spent well into the fall of 1955 finalizing dominance over the sects.<sup>115</sup> The army’s constant combat role prevented the Training Relations and Instruction Mission from providing a consistent level of training.<sup>116</sup> During the summer of 1955, LTG O’Daniel had “insisted that Premier Ngo Dinh Diem bring the hard core of his 45 battalions back from the swamplands and

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<sup>108</sup> Spector, *Advice and Support: The Early Years, 1941-1960*, 265.

<sup>109</sup> Collins, Jr., *Vietnam Studies: The Development and Training of the South Vietnamese Army, 1950-1972*, 10-11. Collins describes division commanders receiving conflicting orders from a corps and a region commander, branch chiefs giving orders to units in the field to which they had no command relationship, or most disturbing, Diem sending “out operational orders directly to combat regiments, bypassing the Department of National Defense, the General Staff, and the field commands.”

<sup>110</sup> Moyer, *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954-1965*, 25. Moyer states that “Diem came to value political loyalty from his military commanders over bravery and combat effectiveness.” This emphasis on political loyalty caused military leaders to focus on the “defense of the government and the status quo against political enemies, rather than battling the growing insurgency.”

<sup>111</sup> See J. Lawton Collins Papers, Series 3, Subseries D, Box 24, Folder Briefing Book 9, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS. Specifically Telegram by Heath to Secretary of State, October 25, 1954 and Memorandum by O’Daniel to Radford, November 3, 1954.

<sup>112</sup> See Webb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Prelude to the War in Vietnam, 1954-1959*, Chapter 4 for a thorough discussion on the Sect Crisis.

<sup>113</sup> Webb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Prelude to the War in Vietnam, 1954-1959*, 59.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 63-64. Both Ely and the French Charge d’Affairs

<sup>115</sup> “Diem Battles Rebels in Swamp,” *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, September 23, 1955.

<sup>116</sup> Webb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Prelude to the War in Vietnam, 1954-1959*, 124-125.

mountains...”<sup>117</sup> Diem did pull some of his forces back to begin training in late July 1955, declaring the “backbone of resistance had been broken and that only mop-up operations remained.”<sup>118</sup> However, by late September of 1955, Diem would still have seven battalions in the field fighting, with high casualties, against the remnants of the Binh Xuyen.<sup>119</sup>

The constant fighting with the Sects would also result in an adverse effect on the Vietnamese unit commanders’ interest in training their units. Williams, in his annual summary, states that “most Vietnamese officers have been of the opinion that once a man has participated in combat he becomes a trained soldier.”<sup>120</sup> This attitude certainly highlights O’Daniel’s assessment that one of the army’s major problems was “the lack of trained leaders....”<sup>121</sup> However, O’Daniel’s actions did little to adjust the trend.

Even when units received instruction during the fighting with the Sects, the Vietnamese National Army soldiers would often revert to old ways of doing things, either French or their own.<sup>122</sup> A more immersive, rigorous training program certainly could have eliminated many of these bad habits, but O’Daniel, in an effort not to rush the Vietnamese National Army leadership, allowed the Vietnamese “to select whatever type training they desired.”<sup>123</sup> Based on reports that “only 30 percent of the field grade officers were qualified, and only 10 percent of the senior officers were qualified,” it seems unlikely that the Vietnamese were qualified to select what

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<sup>117</sup> “Diem’s Army Starts 2<sup>nd</sup> Training Phase,” *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, August 4, 1955.

<sup>118</sup> “Diem Pulls Troops Back for Training,” *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, July 27, 1955.

<sup>119</sup> “Diem Battles Rebels in Swamp,” *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, September 23, 1955.

<sup>120</sup> U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group, Vietnam, “Brief summary of MAAG-TERM activities, November 1955-November 1956,” November 21, 1956, 5. (hereafter MAAG-TERM report)

<sup>121</sup> John W. O’Daniel speech to the American Friends of Vietnam, June 1, 1956, John W. O’Daniel Papers, Box 8, Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle Barracks, PA.

<sup>122</sup> Ngo Quang Truong, *Indochina Monographs: RVNAF and U.S. Operational Cooperation and Coordination* (Washington, DC: Center for Military History, 1980), 173. Lt. General Truong explains that “During the first few years the effort of US advisers met with considerable obstacles, particularly in the area of training. Several years of hard fighting on all battlefields from north to south and of living close to French forces--and undoubtedly under their influence--had instilled a certain psychology of intractability, unruliness, and complacency among the Vietnamese military cadre. Their adjustment to the American way of doing things was painful and slow.”

<sup>123</sup> John W. O’Daniel speech to the American Friends of Vietnam, June 1, 1956. John W. O’Daniel Papers, Box 8, Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle Barracks, PA. O’Daniel also points out that his advisors explained and demonstrated their methods and objectives

training was best for their troops.<sup>124</sup> This uneven and often counter-productive training did little to enhance the Vietnamese National Army effectiveness during this period of time. Even when soldiers were trained to a standard, human nature may have caused leaders to keep better trained soldiers in headquarters billets, rather than assigning them to line units. While the war against the Sects eventually resulted in a clear victory for Diem it had two serious adverse effects. First, the fighting kept large portions of the Vietnamese National Army away from training or re-organization. Second, and more daunting, it strained even more the already visceral relationship between South Vietnam and France.

After 100 years as a French mercantilist colony, the Vietnamese were more than ready for the independence granted them by the Geneva accords. The fact that, “a French officer still retained the title of Commander in Chief, as well as paper responsibility for internal security” irritated Diem and fueled his demands for rapid French withdrawal.<sup>125</sup> Diem even went so far as to “abolish all French first names for Vietnamese nationals.”<sup>126</sup> This intense hatred disrupted Training Relations and Instruction Mission operations on a regular basis. Aside from the previously mentioned arbitrary removal of the French from the Vietnamese Navy, another incident occurred between the French and South Vietnamese at the Quang Tri Training Center. On May 1, 1955 a Nung Regiment was at the training center conducting training when they received several conflicting orders in regards to moving/not moving to Saigon from General Vy and General Don.<sup>127</sup> General Vy, who was a French Airborne officer and later fled to France, had issued move orders.<sup>128</sup> Since French Officers commanded at all levels above company in the Nung Regiment, they planned to move anyway, until the camp Commander, COL Oai, cordoned

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<sup>124</sup> Webb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Prelude to the War in Vietnam, 1954-1959*, 125. The study, prepared by the US Army staff, also pointed out that the Vietnamese were over 4,000 officers under their authorized strength.

<sup>125</sup> Webb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Prelude to the War in Vietnam, 1954-1959*, 83.

<sup>126</sup> Fall, *The Two Viet-Nams: A Political and Military Analysis*, 321.

<sup>127</sup> O'Daniel to Collins, May 7, 1955, J. Lawton Collins Papers, Series 3, Subseries D, Box 29, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

<sup>128</sup> Lam Quang Thi, *The Twenty-Five Year Century: A South Vietnamese General Remembers the Indochina War to the Fall of Saigon* (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 2001), 86.



the camp with his own training center soldiers to prevent the regiment from departing.<sup>129</sup> The French ordered officers to Quang Tri to determine the nature of the problem but were not permitted entrance and returned to Saigon and “ordered all French officers of TRIM not to return to the camp until Colonel Oai was relieved.”<sup>130</sup> The infighting continued until May 6, when LTG O’Daniel was informed of the situation and was forced to intervene to get training back on track.<sup>131</sup> Regardless, training had been disrupted for an entire week due to the intense animosity shared by the South Vietnamese towards the French.

In the same memo to GEN Collins, O’Daniel relayed another example of animosity towards the French and their supporters. In Hue, from May 1-2, 1955, both American and French advisors reported a demonstration with “anti-French trends” occurring throughout the city.<sup>132</sup> The years of animosity towards the French were clearly not helped by earlier French support for the sects against Diem.<sup>133</sup> Upon investigation, O’Daniel learned that the demonstrations were condemning the Binh Xuyen and were organized by the “military commander with Second Region at Hue in conjunction with civilians loyal Diem.”<sup>134</sup> This commander was previously recommended for relief by O’Daniel in an April 16, 1955 memorandum to Collins for being, “continually at war with the French,” and because he “habitually sends complaints directly to the President.”<sup>135</sup> However, South Vietnamese disagreements with the French did not stop with complaining, but spilled into operations as well.

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<sup>129</sup> O’Daniel to Collins, May 7, 1955, J. Lawton Collins Papers, Series 3, Subseries D, Box 29, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Webb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Prelude to the War in Vietnam, 1954-1959*. (Washington, D.C.: Office of Joint History, 2007), 85.

<sup>134</sup> O’Daniel to Collins, May 7, 1955, J. Lawton Collins Papers, Series 3, Subseries D, Box 29, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

<sup>135</sup> O’Daniel to Collins, 14 April 1955, J. Lawton Collins Papers, Series 3, Subseries D, Box 29, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

Both Edward Lansdale and Rufus Phillips recall an incident of blatant deception from the South Vietnamese during the briefing of Operation Liberty, South Vietnam's pacification plan.<sup>136</sup> The French and American advisors, O'Daniel being the senior officer present, were receiving the briefing. Lansdale claims that "...the Vietnamese didn't want to tell anything to the French on the thing."<sup>137</sup> During the briefing, Lansdale recalled that the Vietnamese were briefing, "...completely fake plans because the French were along."<sup>138</sup> During the briefing, Phillips claimed to "tip Lansdale off in advance."<sup>139</sup> Lansdale had to explain to O'Daniel "Don't ask him questions in detail on this. I'll explain later. It isn't what they're going to do."<sup>140</sup> A private briefing, outlining the true plan, occurred later between the Americans and South Vietnamese.<sup>141</sup> This incident, and several others similar to it, clearly portrays the utter lack of trust the Vietnamese held for the French officers working within the mission. It seems impossible that any unity could be expected when two groups possessed such contempt for the other.

These incidents of discord between the French and South Vietnamese clearly indicate a trend that cooperation towards a common goal was nearly impossible. The South Vietnamese disgust for the French Expeditionary Corps culminated in the burning of French insignia at bonfire following the departure of French forces in 1956.<sup>142</sup> It would seem impossible for Training Relations and Instruction Mission to create any unity of effort when feelings of hatred were so prevalent.

In the larger scheme of things, the infighting between the French and South Vietnamese explains only another part of the problem in training the South Vietnamese military. Advisors assisting in the relocation of the 900,000 civilians and tons of equipment from Haiphong and

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<sup>136</sup> Rufus Phillips, *Why Vietnam Matters: An Eyewitness Account of Lessons Not Learned* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 38.

<sup>137</sup> Lansdale Interview, Tape 1, 19.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Phillips, *Why Vietnam Matters: An Eyewitness Account of Lessons Not Learned*, 38.

<sup>140</sup> Lansdale Interview, Tape 1, 19. Lansdale felt the whole briefing was a shame and claimed that the French accused him and the rest of the Americans of putting the Vietnamese up to deceiving them.

<sup>141</sup> Phillips, *Why Vietnam Matters: An Eyewitness Account of Lessons Not Learned*, 38.

<sup>142</sup> Fall, *The Two Viet-Nams: A Political and Military Analysis*, 320.

balancing the visceral relationship between their other two partners clearly diminished the mission's ability to conduct more than tertiary levels of instruction. When combined with having to beg President Diem to pull forces off the line in an on-going civil war and convincing senior South Vietnamese officers of the importance of conducting training, the argument that training could have been anything other than marginally effective breaks down. However, even with all the complications generated by the South Vietnamese themselves, one final organization shares in the blame for the mission's failure, the United States itself.

### **Internal De-synchronization: The American Advisors**

The United States Military reluctantly entered into Vietnam, despite the vigorous disagreements of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Joint Chiefs had, "no wish to be drawn into a situation where the United States would have responsibility for a program that faced a good chance of failure though factors beyond US control."<sup>143</sup> At one point, even Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, in a November 20, 1954 memo to J. Lawton Collins stated that "We do not wish to be saddled with full responsibility for what happens in Vietnam because prospective developments there are very dubious. Furthermore it seems clear that if Vietnam is to be saved it will require full French cooperation."<sup>144</sup>

However, Dulles ultimately shifted his stance and won the argument in favor of supporting South Vietnam and a training mission was sent to Saigon.<sup>145</sup> Once the United States finally gained control of the training of the Vietnamese National Army, following ratification of the Collins-Ely Agreement, Lieutenant General O'Daniel set to work.<sup>146</sup> O'Daniel had a stated goal of making the Vietnamese National Army capable of, "10 combat ready division by July

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<sup>143</sup> Webb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Prelude to the War in Vietnam, 1954-1959*, 38.

<sup>144</sup> John F. Dulles to J. Lawton Collins, 20 November 1954, J. Lawton Collins Papers, Series 3, Subseries E, Box 32, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

<sup>145</sup> Webb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Prelude to the War in Vietnam, 1954-1959*, 39-40.

<sup>146</sup> Amb. J. Lawton Collins and GEN Paul Ely, "Memorandum of Agreement," 13 December 1954, J. Lawton Collins Papers, Series 3, Subseries E, Box 32, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

1956,” a mere 17 months from the time he assumed the responsibility.<sup>147</sup> Unfortunately for O’Daniel, several factors, above and beyond French and Vietnamese agendas, would seek to derail his plans.

Lieutenant General O’Daniel’s primary issue stemmed from a lack of personnel. The Military Advise and Assist Group – Indochina (later Vietnam) and therefore the American contribution to the Training Relations and Instruction Mission was minimal at best. The mission’s staff in the beginning consisted of, “200 former French cadre/advisors and 68 Americans...”<sup>148</sup> While it did increase over time, even at peak levels of 1000 personnel, the work load was more than the training mission could handle. Due to Article 16 of the Geneva Accords, which limited foreign military personnel in Vietnam, the State Department, “limited the number of MAAG spaces to no more than 342.”<sup>149</sup> Collins pleaded with the State Department arguing that “Article 16 makes no mention of American military as such, but is couched in general terms.”<sup>150</sup> He further stated that “It is quite possible as I see it that Accord might be read so that departing French personnel could be replaced by an American.” O’Daniel also had made requests for additional advisors in order to carry out the myriad of missions he had been tasked with, however, due to, “the relative calm in Southeast Asia and the more sanguine view taken by US officials of the security threat,” O’Daniel was denied.<sup>151</sup> These shortages caused officers to serve, “both as staff officers in their organization and as advisers for ARVN counterparts in the

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<sup>147</sup> “Dien’s Army Starts 2<sup>nd</sup> Training Phase” *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, August 4, 1955.

<sup>148</sup> “Vietnam Counterinsurgency - The Dien Era,” No Date, Folder 05, Box 19, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 06 - Democratic Republic of Vietnam, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, 65.

<sup>149</sup> Webb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Prelude to the War in Vietnam, 1954-1959*, 93.

<sup>150</sup> Memo, Charge in Vietnam (Kidder) to the Department of State, 14 December 1954, Department of State, *FRUS, 1952-1954, Indochina*, vol. 13, pt. 2, 2368-2369.

<sup>151</sup> Webb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Prelude to the War in Vietnam, 1954-1959*, 93-94. Authors Note: O’Daniel was additionally still tasked with running Military Advise and Assist Group - Indochina, which still maintained responsibilities in Cambodia as well as equipment recovery from the French and participation in refugee relocation from the North. See *Vietnam Studies: Command and Control 1950-1969*, p.12-13 by George Eckhardt for more on the Military Advise and Assist Group – Indochina’s duties.

same branch of service.”<sup>152</sup> Clearly, the staff attempting to operate in two headquarters simultaneously did little to add to the effectiveness of training during the period.

While O’Daniel’s small staff was kept busy with multiple, simultaneous missions, those advisors that were able to get out with Vietnamese National Army units faced additional challenges once they arrived. The first hurdle that advisors could not quickly overcome was the language barrier. Historians have thoroughly documented that American advisors did not speak Vietnamese and made little effort to learn prior to 1962.<sup>153</sup> Advisors used interpreters to, “eliminate the language barrier, but the communication process was slow,” and often forced advisors to use hand signals.<sup>154</sup> As former South Vietnamese Chief of the Joint General Staff Cao Van Vien stated, “I know of no single instance in which a U.S. advisor effectively discussed professional matters with his counterpart in Vietnamese.”<sup>155</sup> Even Lieutenant General Williams made extensive use of interpreters in his sessions with President Diem. Diem, while fluent in French, was unable to speak English.<sup>156</sup> Williams would occasionally tell his interpreter to explain to him what the President was saying but after a while this process became too disruptive. Williams then took the extra step of directing his interpreter to take notes and not interpret until after the meeting ended.<sup>157</sup> Williams claims that since he could not “...remember everything...” he would have the interpreter later “...write out in longhand what had been said during the last two or three hours.”<sup>158</sup> Williams stated on more than one occasion that he did not speak

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<sup>152</sup> Cao Van Vien, *Indochina Monographs: The U.S. Advisor* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 33.

<sup>153</sup> Robert D. Ramsey, *Advising Indigenous Forces: American Advisors in Korea, Vietnam and El Salvador* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2006 ), 40. Ramsey describes the Military Assistance Training Advisory (MATA) program started at Fort Bragg in 1962. Among the initial program of instruction was 46 hours of Vietnamese language training. This eventually moved to encompass over 50 percent of the course.

<sup>154</sup> Cao Van Vien, *Indochina Monographs: The U.S. Advisor*, 157.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid*, 31-32.

<sup>156</sup> Beech Interview, Tape 1, . 26. Beech describes the laborious process of a meeting with Diem. Diem would speak for long periods of time, often “fifteen or twenty minutes” before allowing translation. Beech also states that since none of Diem’s visitors spoke French or Vietnamese, everything had to be translated into English.

<sup>157</sup> Williams Interview, Tape 1, 36.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid*, 36.

Vietnamese and testified to Congress that he had "...been unable to learn the language..." and of his officers, only "...one has learned Vietnamese while in Vietnam."<sup>159</sup> Williams continued to explain that Vietnamese was too hard to learn Vietnamese due to the multiple meanings of words, the limited time available to advisors and the fact that many Vietnamese wanted to learn English.<sup>160</sup> It is inconceivable that Williams, relying on summaries following his meetings, could have accomplished very much during meetings when his interpreter was not interpreting.<sup>161</sup>

If advisors found communications a challenge, even harder was the difficulty of teaching U.S. doctrine and techniques to an army trained from French methods for decades.<sup>162</sup> The officers of the Vietnamese National Army during 1955 had been "trained by the French cadre and had learned the military doctrine and tactics of the French Expeditionary Corps."<sup>163</sup> In fact, "few South Vietnamese officers shared, or even understood, the American officers' belief in coordination, team-work, loyalty to superiors and subordinates, know-how, and delegation of authority."<sup>164</sup> Many times, Americans found that the "Need for adoption of US methods was often outweighed by nationalistic considerations."<sup>165</sup> During the early days of Training Relations and Instruction Mission, South Vietnamese confusion increased as "French instructors often ridiculed the South Vietnamese soldiers and the new American training methods."<sup>166</sup> As a result," a minor difference in opinion was apt to take days to resolve."<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> "Situation in Vietnam: Committee on Foreign Affairs", July 1959, p120, Folder 03, Box 48, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 03 - Legal and Legislative, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid, 120.

<sup>161</sup> Those whom have been advisors to foreign nations in the past well understand the need for discourse during meetings with their counterparts. Many modern advisors still may not be able to converse in a non-native tongue. However, the process of interpretation, combined with seeing body language, at the time of conversation is critical to understanding context and meaning.

<sup>162</sup> Cao Van Vien, *Indochina Monographs: The U.S. Advisor*, 158.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, 158.

<sup>164</sup> Ronald H. Spector. "The First Vietnamization: U.S. Advisors in Vietnam, 1956-1960," in *The American Military and the Far East: Proceedings of the Ninth Military History Symposium*, Joe C. Dixon ed., (Colorado Springs, CO: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1980), 109-115.

<sup>165</sup> MAAG-TERM report, 2.

<sup>166</sup> Spector, *Advice and Support: The Early Years, 1941-1960*, 241.

<sup>167</sup> Cao Van Vien, *Indochina Monographs: The U.S. Advisor*, 31.

The final issue plaguing American Training Relations and Instruction Mission officers in 1955-1956 was the bureaucracy of the United States itself. In one instance, policy prevented the observation and assessment of how training was progressing.<sup>168</sup> Even if advisors did eventually get through to their Vietnamese National Army counterparts, a State Department Policy forbade American's from participating in "combat activities."<sup>169</sup> During this period, the sect wars most assuredly would constitute combat. Thus, advisors were forced to sit at camps and wait for their units to return.<sup>170</sup> In another case during the command of Lieutenant General Samuel T. Williams, Williams pointed out that he would, "spend much of his time not involved in training in an attempt to work with the rest of the country team on the many discussions over the budgeting of the United States Aid program."<sup>171</sup> In fact, requests of all kinds had to go through numerous levels of military and civilian approval before going to, "Washington to face the State Department and the Department of Defense before final judgment was passed."<sup>172</sup> In one final example of minimal support from higher levels, Williams points out that he received no national level intelligence support from Washington D.C. In fact, Williams stated "I think the Vietnamese officers, their headquarters, gave me all the information they could get...."<sup>173</sup> In light of these many complications, one might begin to wonder how O'Daniel could make the claim to *Pacific Stars and Stripes* in November of 1955 that the Vietnamese National Army has, "nine out of 10 chances to resist successfully" invasion from the North."<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Croizat to GEN Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr., 17 September 1955, Folder 01, Box 01, Victor J. Croizat Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.

<sup>169</sup> Whitlow, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: The Advisory & Combat Assistance Era, 1954-1964*, 19.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Frederick W. Schneider, "Advising the ARVN: Lieutenant General Samuel T. Williams in Vietnam, 1955-1960," (Master's thesis, University of North Texas, 1990), 39.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid, 40. Schneider describes the request process beginning at Military Advise and Assist Group, moving to the country team, then to their superiors at Unified Command at PACOM, then to State and finally to the Defense Department. All the while, staffs conducted independent analysis and raised additional objections.

<sup>173</sup> Williams Interview, Tape 1, 80.

<sup>174</sup> "New President Counting Heavily on Army to Resist Communism," *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, November 15, 1955.

## Success Stories

This work would be mistaken to examine only the negative results of the Training Relations and Instruction Mission. Over the course of a year, certainly some efforts met with varying levels of success. In fact, regardless of the multiple incidents of personality conflict, stubbornness and general ill will, some positive outcomes did occur. These successes occurred in a wide range of areas, but generally occurred within the Vietnamese National Army. The first major success occurred with the re-integration of former Sect army forces.

O'Daniel had been trying, unsuccessfully, for months to “bring the Sect leaders together and explain to them just what we were trying to do...and the place that the Sect groups could play in the new Army.”<sup>175</sup> Finally, in March, O'Daniel received authorization to conduct a briefing to each of the Sect leaders to “acquaint all concerned with the functions of TRIM and its’ mission.....”<sup>176</sup> During the meeting, O'Daniel and his combined staff briefed senior Sect leaders on all aspects of upcoming training initiatives. O'Daniel was acting on what he says was Diem’s plan to integrate “about 20,000 of the sect members into the National Army.”<sup>177</sup> O'Daniel claims that following the meeting “there were many defections from the sect groups to the National Army.”<sup>178</sup> The new members of the National Army would go on to help Diem defeat the renegade Binh Xuyen sect. Much of the success from the re-integration initiative was the work of Lansdale and his National Security Division, who also played a key role in the development of the Vietnamese National Army’s training.

In the realm of training and training facilities, the mission did make some progress over the year. Advisors determined that firing ranges in South Vietnam mainly consisted of “a few

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<sup>175</sup> O'Daniel, *Footsteps to Freedom: Artillery at Midnight*, 6.

<sup>176</sup> O'Daniel to Ely, March 17, 1955, J. Lawton Collins Papers, Series 3, Subseries D, Box 29, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

<sup>177</sup> O'Daniel, *Footsteps to Freedom: Artillery at Midnight*, 6.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid, 7. O'Daniel states that the entire Cao Dai force of 10,000 men and two regiments of the Hao Hao rallied to the government.



unsatisfactory and totally inadequate French ranges....”<sup>179</sup> A range committee was established in November of 1955 that planned and began construction on modern range complexes to service the divisions. Not only did the mission improve existing training facilities, but also established a training cadre capable of training over 10,000 troops per training cycle. O’Daniel states, “some of our U.S. trainers gave instruction to a number of Vietnamese for a period of six weeks. These then became the training cadre for the camp [Quang Trung Training Center] and have been training 10,000 [soldiers] at one time.”<sup>180</sup> The total training time for new recruits expanded from a 25-week cycle to a “...31 week program which more nearly conforms to US training programs and the current needs of the Vietnamese Army.”<sup>181</sup> Keeping in mind the earlier discussion about the qualification of South Vietnamese officers and their beliefs in training, the mission claimed that by November of 1956, “three (3) field and one (1) light division completed training programs which culminated in division field exercises.”<sup>182</sup> Regardless of the quality of training conducted, the fact that training occurred at all was an improvement over the previous system under the French. Soldier skills were not the only area of improvement regarding training, as more was necessary to promote an effective pacification program.

In early pacification efforts, Vietnamese National Army troops had “become accustomed to mistreating civilians” and were thus “not the best representative of the new government.”<sup>183</sup> The troops had a penchant for “...pillaging and stealing chickens and not having very good behavior with the civilian population.”<sup>184</sup> For the upcoming pacifications of the Camau Peninsula (Operation Liberty - February 1955) and Interzone Five in central Vietnam (Operation Giai-Phong - April 1955), Lansdale and his young lieutenant Phillips conceived an indoctrination

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<sup>179</sup> MAAG-TERM report, 5.

<sup>180</sup> John W. O’Daniel speech to the American Friends of Vietnam, June 1, 1956. John W. O’Daniel Papers, Box 8, Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle Barracks, PA.

<sup>181</sup> MAAG-TERM report, 5

<sup>182</sup> Ibid, 5. The French had been gone for six months by this time, so the actual number trained is likely far lower for the mission’s actual period of existence.

<sup>183</sup> Lansdale, “Memorandum For The Record - "Pacification" In Vietnam.”

<sup>184</sup> Phillips Interview, Tape 1, 16.

program for participating troops.<sup>185</sup> The training, run by Vietnamese training teams, covered topics ranging from “the courtesy of the road” to a “series of playlets” that would teach proper behavior when interacting with civilians.<sup>186</sup> The training further taught soldiers how to interact with civilians to gain intelligence and search for hidden weapons caches.<sup>187</sup> While Lansdale, during the training claimed that “This behavioral training and indoctrination fell far short of efforts common to Asian Communist Forces,” Phillips, who was on the ground during the execution, saw otherwise.<sup>188</sup> Phillips points out that during the three months of clearing operations “...there was not a single incident between a Vietnamese soldier and a civilian, not one.”<sup>189</sup> The result was that “trained, indoctrinated units would immediately establish law and order, act as disciplined soldiers, and lend a helping hand in rebuilding....”<sup>190</sup> While early pacification efforts had varying degrees of success, by the time Operation Giai-Phong had completed in the summer of 1955, Lansdale could rightly assess that, “Our method worked.”<sup>191</sup>

Clearly, not everything that the Training Relations and Instruction Mission did was a failure. In fact, several of their successes were critical to the continued existence of the South Vietnamese state. Rallying the majority of two of the dissident sects to the national government side certainly enabled Diem to decisively defeat elements unwilling to join in his vision of a new South Vietnam. The improvements to training and facilities were additionally a step in the right direction for an army that had previously received no training whatsoever. These successes, however significant, did not allow the mission to achieve its goal, but did “...establish a sound

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<sup>185</sup> Lansdale, *In the Midst of Wars: An American's Mission to Southeast Asia*, 228-239. Chapter 13 covers Lansdale's 1955 pacification efforts. Also see Phillips, *Why Vietnam Matters*, chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid, 232-33. Lansdale mentions specifically the Chinese and Mao's rules of discipline and how violators were commonly shot for violating them. This comment does not mean Lansdale felt the effort unsuccessful, but does hint that he was hoping for more.

<sup>187</sup> Lansdale, “Memorandum For The Record - "Pacification" In Vietnam.”

<sup>188</sup> Ibid, 233.

<sup>189</sup> Phillips Interview, Tape 1, 16. The operation involved nearly two full divisions of Vietnamese National Army troops.

<sup>190</sup> Lansdale, “Memorandum For The Record - "Pacification" In Vietnam.”

<sup>191</sup> Lansdale, *In the Midst of Wars: An American's Mission to Southeast Asia*, 240.

base and firm understanding...” that would enable future advisors to “reap considerable benefits from the past twelve months.”<sup>192</sup>

## Conclusion

Bernard Fall wrote that, “for a short while, the façade of Franco-American “unity” was preserved for the benefit of the outside world...”<sup>193</sup> Constant political bickering from the strategic to the tactical levels plagued the well-intentioned Training Relations and Instruction Mission from the outset. None of the participants were truly interested in working with one another to achieve their politically stated goals. These conflicting goals came together with less than spectacular results in the combined training mission. While on the surface, all sides tried to get along, the situation behind closed doors was less cooperative.

The French desired to retain some of their colonial prestige. However, the crisis in Algeria and the turbulent political situation back home diverted French attention away from Vietnam. In less than two years, the French focus shifted. Instead of retaining regional influence in Indochina, through enforcement of the Geneva accords, and providing wide area security, France began relocating American provided equipment to France and leaving the South Vietnamese to fend for themselves.

The South Vietnamese government claimed it wanted a strong military, capable of defending its’ sovereignty from attack, but at the completion of Training Relations and Instruction Mission, the Vietnamese National Army was no more capable of defense than a year prior.<sup>194</sup> While certainly Diem had a firmer grip on the political direction of the nation, his

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<sup>192</sup> MAAG-TERM report, 2. Based on the date, it is important to note that the French Advisors, besides Air Force and Navy, departed Vietnam nearly six months prior to the writing of this report.

<sup>193</sup> Fall, *The Two Viet-Nams: A Political and Military Analysis*, 318.

<sup>194</sup> Spector, *Advice and Support: The Early Years, 1941-1960*, 278. In fact, Spector states that “many of its [ARVN] divisions existed largely on paper; even those which had begun to function lacked their full complement of men and material. Virtually all the divisional and regimental commanders were new to their units and did not know their men or their subordinate officers. Few had ever commanded anything larger than a battalion. All lacked experience in the use of artillery and other supporting arms.”

increased control came at the expense of the growth of his armed forces. The lack of trust in the French, and initially with the Americans as well, slowed progress and resulted in Williams' assessment of the army not being capable until 1958 or 1959.<sup>195</sup>

Finally, the United States desired a stable and free South Vietnam. It claimed a desire to develop a strong army, within a little over a year, capable of self-defense. Once South Vietnam was capable of defending themselves, America could quickly exit the newly formed nation and allow the people of South Vietnam to flourish. To have such naive expectations in the midst of the tremendous political upheavals of 1955 bordered on irresponsible. The Americans were clearly in a hurry and wanted to get out of Vietnam.

Few if any of the three participants' actions reflected their desires and as a result of their lack of unity of effort, the Vietnamese National Army was a weaker and smaller organization by late 1956. Williams directly refutes O'Daniel's optimistic assessment of the South Vietnamese odds against the North by stating that "had they [Viet Minh] come down in 1955 or 1956 they could walk in standing up."<sup>196</sup> In the end, while the United States and South Vietnam impatiently waited for the French Expeditionary Corps to depart, the Training Relations and Instruction Mission merely succeeded in maintaining the status quo, losing a year of valuable training time. Perhaps the opinion of the French High Commissioner in Vietnam, General Paul Ely best summed up the feelings of all sides. In his 1964 memoirs *Indo-China in Turmoil*, Ely stated that:

It cannot really be said that this organization functioned smoothly. Differences in concept, differences in languages, disagreements among the Vietnamese, scheming by certain American officers, and obstruction by some of our officers inevitably hampered its activity.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Williams Interview, Tape I, 77. Williams states that he felt the North would have a "terrible fight" if it crossed the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel in 1959.

<sup>196</sup> Williams Interview, Tape I, 77.

<sup>197</sup> Ely, *L'Indo-Chine dans la Tourmente (Indo-China in Turmoil)*, 152. Undoubtedly, the American Officer that Ely was referring to was Edward Lansdale.

Ely clarified his remark by stating that overall there was “a good will effort and a desire for cooperation on the part of everyone.”<sup>198</sup> However, good will and effort alone rarely accomplish goals in the midst of such fundamental disagreements and disruptions. Had the organization been more unified in its goals and put aside their differences, the Vietnamese National Army may have been better postured for future combat, rather than be pushed to the wayside by the U.S. Army in later years.

### **Vietnam Experience Applied to Contemporary Doctrine?**

The military advice provided by the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the negotiations for American assumption of the military training mission was sound. By setting the condition that Americans would not instruct South Vietnamese forces until the French had been phased-out, the Joint Chiefs were ensuring that advisors would “be free to use US methods and doctrines.”<sup>199</sup> Perhaps the Joint Chiefs saw the high potential for friction should two different nations attempt to conduct a combined training effort without a unified philosophy or doctrine. Up to 1955, no attempt had been made to conduct a multi-national training mission. The success in Korea and the division of labor in Greece would have informed the Joint Chiefs of the necessity for either having a unified system or conducting the training unilaterally.

In 2009, the American Army published its first effort to unify and codify a doctrine concerning advising. Field Manual 3-07.1 Security Force Assistance lays out a doctrinal framework that when applied, would enable an advisory mission to create a plan to generate, employ, transition, and sustain a host nation force.<sup>200</sup> More importantly, does contemporary doctrine account for the experiences from the Training Relations and Instruction Mission? A brief examination of the current doctrinal command and control structures and the six imperatives

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>199</sup> Webb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Prelude to the War in Vietnam, 1954-1959*, 44.

<sup>200</sup> Field Manual 3-07.1 *Security Force Assistance* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 2009), 2-8 – 2-9.

for Security Force Assistance, compared to what occurred in Vietnam, will answer this question.<sup>201</sup>

The most important aspect of the current doctrine concerns the command and control structure of a security force assistance mission. Field Manual 3-07.1 identifies three major command structures available to the mission commander: Lead Nation, Integrated Command, and Parallel Command.<sup>202</sup> In Vietnam, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were arguing for a lead nation command structure, with the United States as the lead. This structure is also identified in current doctrine as the most desirable, because it allows for one nation to set the direction and organization of the mission. Lead nation allows for the maximum unity of effort. What actually occurred in South Vietnam in 1955 might be described as a combination of an Integrated and a Parallel Command Structure. The United States and France were integrated or “organized under an integrated command structure” to ensure “unity of effort in a multinational setting.”<sup>203</sup> The training mission’s staff consisted “of representatives from all member nations.”<sup>204</sup> However, the host nation was operating in parallel requiring “coordination among the participants to attain unity of effort.”<sup>205</sup> While integrated is considered less than desirable, parallel is explicitly identified as “the least desirable command structure for SFA.”<sup>206</sup> As has been demonstrated in this study, and forewarned by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the command structure of the advisory effort in South Vietnam in 1955-1956 was suboptimal and contributed to the plethora of issues experienced as the mission was executed. Unfortunately, little has changed over the decades in terms of unifying a combined training mission. Current advisory missions continue to experience some of the same organizational and doctrinal issues experienced by the Training Relations and

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid, 2-1 – 2-2. The six imperatives of Security Force Assistance are; Understanding the Operational Environment, Provide Effective Leadership, Build Legitimacy, Manage Information, Ensure Unity of Effort and Sustain the Effort.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid, 1-8. Also identified are Alliance and Coalition Command Structures. Both of these are identified as variations of either parallel or lead nation structures.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid, 1-8.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid, 1-8

<sup>205</sup> Ibid, 1-9

<sup>206</sup> Ibid, 1-9.

Instruction Mission.<sup>207</sup> Having determined that the experiences of a less-than-effective command structure appear unchanged, the study can now examine how the current imperatives of Security Force Assistance were historically informed by experiences in South Vietnam.

FM 3-07 claims that the imperatives of security force assistance “come from the historical record and recent experience.”<sup>208</sup> The first of these imperatives is to understand the operational environment. An appreciation for all aspects of the environment, from military, civil, political, and geographical, “is critical to conducting effective SFA.”<sup>209</sup> This study has demonstrated that O’Daniel and Williams likely did not fully appreciate the environment affecting this mission. While both understood the need for greater numbers of trainers and advisors, neither seemed to ever fully grasp the unpopularity of Diem, the ineffectiveness of the military leadership or the intentions of the North Vietnamese. Additionally, while each officer recognized the enormous amounts of unaccounted equipment present in the theater that would assist in the arming and equipping of the Vietnamese National Army, neither recognized the cultural incompatibility of American organizational structure on a less centralized Vietnamese National Army. Finally, all sides seemed to forget the national objectives of the others in their professional interactions. While O’Daniel and his American team clearly understood the American objective of a free, self-sufficient South Vietnam, they discounted the French objectives of retaining some level of prestige and economic presence and attempted to reign in

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<sup>207</sup> In a February 3, 2011 briefing at the School of Advanced Military Studies, LTC Michael Loos commander of 2-22 Infantry, 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division, relayed his unit’s experiences within the NATO Training Mission at the Kabul Military Training Center in Afghanistan. Of his two major recommendations for senior leaders, one was to develop a standardized doctrine for all NATO forces conducting advisory missions. He had identified the conflict in doctrine and advisory practices as a key disconnect in the training of the Afghan National Army. In his briefing, it was mentioned that American forces were training Afghan soldiers, while two other coalition partners were responsible for training the officers and non-commissioned officers. While LTC Loos had no metrics, it seems reasonable to suspect that soldiers being trained by three different nations, doctrines and techniques will have some adverse effect on the overall effectiveness of the Afghan military.

<sup>208</sup> Field Manual 3-07.1 Security Force Assistance, 2-1.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid, 2-1. While FM 3-07.1 does not provide any idea of how forces should best understand the environment, current methodologies like the Military Decision Making Process and Design are effective tools for generating understanding. See FM 5-0 for greater explanation of both Design and the Military Decision Making Process.

Diem's goal and methods of unifying his government. While modern planning methodologies like the military decision-making process and design have allowed commander's to enhance their understanding, it is impossible to expect any human to fully understand a foreign environment. Only by developing focused commander's critical information requirements and surging intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance assets can commander's expand understanding.<sup>210</sup> Additionally, it seems very likely that in today's advisory efforts, like Afghanistan, national objectives will continue to conflict with each other and affect the host nation force.

The second imperative of security force assistance is to provide effective leadership. Leadership has been the hallmark of American military operations for centuries and is critical "in the dynamic and complex environments" of advising.<sup>211</sup> It cannot be argued that a shortage of American leaders in Vietnam. O'Daniel, Williams, and the rest of the country and advisory teams spent countless hours at all levels of both French and South Vietnamese leadership, from national to individual soldiers. However, leadership requires more than presence and setting the example; even more so when trying to lead two other nations in a coalition effort. FM 6-22, Army Leadership states that army "Leaders serve to provide purpose, direction and motivation."<sup>212</sup> It seems in the case of the Training Relations and Instruction Mission that while direction was present, neither purpose nor motivation influenced parties enough to be effective. Time will tell how effective American leadership in Afghanistan and Iraq have been, but it is comforting to know that current doctrine recognizes that leading in a coalition environment is "inherently more challenging due to differences in culture, language, training, and other aspects."<sup>213</sup>

An equally challenging prospect, building legitimacy, serves as the third imperative in security force assistance operations. Over the past decade, much discussion and study, to include

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<sup>210</sup> Nothing was discovered in the research for this study that the leadership of the training mission had any kind of collection plan, either enemy or friendly focused.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid, 2-2

<sup>212</sup> Field Manual 6-22 *Army Leadership* (Washington, D.C: Department of the Army, 2006), 7-1.

<sup>213</sup> Field Manual 3-07.1 *Security Force Assistance*, 2-2



the Army's publication of a counter-insurgency manual, has been focused on the need to create legitimate governments and forces.<sup>214</sup> In Field Manual 3-07.1, legitimacy is determined by "...local civilians and the international community" and "...includes the moral and political legitimacy of a host-nation government or partner organization."<sup>215</sup> Clearly, American leadership determined that Diem was the legitimate head of South Vietnam and made every effort to make that belief a reality. As has already been mentioned, the French never truly accepted Diem as the legitimate head of the government, and vigorously disagreed with American policy. In terms of making the Army more legitimate, efforts to professionalize officers and, to a greater extent, the training Lansdale and Phillips did for units prior to involvement in pacification missions were all efforts to enhance legitimacy. Unfortunately Diem never achieved the legitimacy America had hoped for, in either the eyes of the people or even in his own security forces. Contemporary efforts have already seen several crises of legitimacy in leadership in Afghanistan and Iraq. If Diem, and his successors are an example, leaders in these modern countries would do well to stay in line with American policy or risk isolation and overthrow.

The fourth imperative of security force assistance is to manage information. This imperative claims that successful security force assistance "disseminates, timely and protected relevant information, integrates it during planning, and leverages it appropriately during execution."<sup>216</sup> The level of information sharing between all parties varied from day to day. Evidence has shown that the level of trust between France and Vietnam was non-existent and great efforts were made to prevent details of operations from reaching French commanders. Little has changed over time. Over classification of relevant information and exclusion of host nation forces from access to time sensitive data, at times has plagued modern advisory efforts.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 2006). The manual has a section entitled "Legitimacy is the Main Objective" and uses the word legitimacy over 80 times throughout the manual.

<sup>215</sup> Field Manual 3-07.1 *Security Force Assistance*, 2-2.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid, 2-2.

<sup>217</sup> Comment purely derived from the author's experiences in Iraq in 2004-2005 and 2008-2009.

While policies rightly have changed over time, the damaging effects of failing to properly manage information and incorporate host nation forces remains a key area requiring constant leader attention.

The fifth imperative, ensure unity of effort, is the underlying theme of this entire study. While only a few sentences in the manual, they implicitly bear out the lessons derived from Vietnam and deserve repeating here:

SFA often includes many actors, making unity of effort essential for success. SFA will include U.S. and foreign security forces, including conventional forces, special forces, or a combination. Other civilian and military joint and military organizations are often involved in SFA. Planners integrate them into one cohesive effort.<sup>218</sup>

This study has shown how a failure of unity of effort can negatively affect a security force assistance mission.

The final imperative that can have catastrophic results for the host-nation force is to sustain the effort. This imperative requires that leaders develop program which are “durable, consistent and sustainable by both the U.S.” and host nation forces.<sup>219</sup> At no point during O’Daniel or Williams’ tenure as mission commander was South Vietnam self-sustaining. The French handled the logistical system and expertise was non-existent within the Vietnamese National Army. American aid kept South Vietnam afloat for its entire existence and the decision of Congress in 1972 to cease aid, monetary and equipment, likely was the death knell for the nation. While Iraq has oil money and ports that will likely sustain security forces for years to come, there still exists an immature logistical system that greatly diminishes the effectiveness of employed forces.<sup>220</sup> Afghanistan’s isolation and relative economic dependence on American aid

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<sup>218</sup> Field Manual 3-07.1 *Security Force Assistance*, 2-2.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid, 2-2. This imperative consists of two parts: the U.S. ability to sustain the host nation force as well as the host nation’s ability to sustain itself.

<sup>220</sup> This comment is based on the author’s experience as a Border Brigade Transition Team leader from 2008-2009 in Basrah, Iraq. The author observed firsthand the extreme inefficiencies of the Iraqi logistical system. Unit Commander’s operated under the assumption that higher leaders “knew what units required” and would push items to the commands. This often led to unit leaders using their own money to purchase fuel and food to sustain their units for three to four weeks at a time.

sets the stage for a possible repeat of Congress's reduction or suspension of aid, especially as domestic issues dominate the attention of lawmakers.

The conclusion then is that many of the errors from the Training Relations and Instruction Mission are accounted for in current doctrine. The coalition advisory effort in Vietnam violated the vast majority of the modern imperatives of security force assistance during its brief existence. While promising that these experiences are accounted for in modern doctrine, one can only hope that their appearance in modern doctrine is the result of historical study, rather than modern practical experience. The unfortunate truth is that many of the mistakes of the past have, at one point or another, re-appeared in modern advisory efforts. Had today's doctrine been published at the time, it seems unlikely that political conditions would have allowed for O'Daniel or Williams to fully implement it. However, it would have been better than merely relying "entirely to the 'talents' of the commander, his 'intuition', his 'feel'."<sup>221</sup> Only through the continuous examination of our history and its interpretation and doctrinal application to modern situations, can organizations like the Training Relations and Instruction Mission be avoided.

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<sup>221</sup> V.K. Triandafilov, *The Nature of the Operations of Modern Armies* (Portland, OR: Frank Cass & Co, 1994), 165.

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